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THE GLOBAL GQ SPORTS ISSUE

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MOST
DOMINANT
ATHLETES

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The Greatest Antiheroes in Sports History

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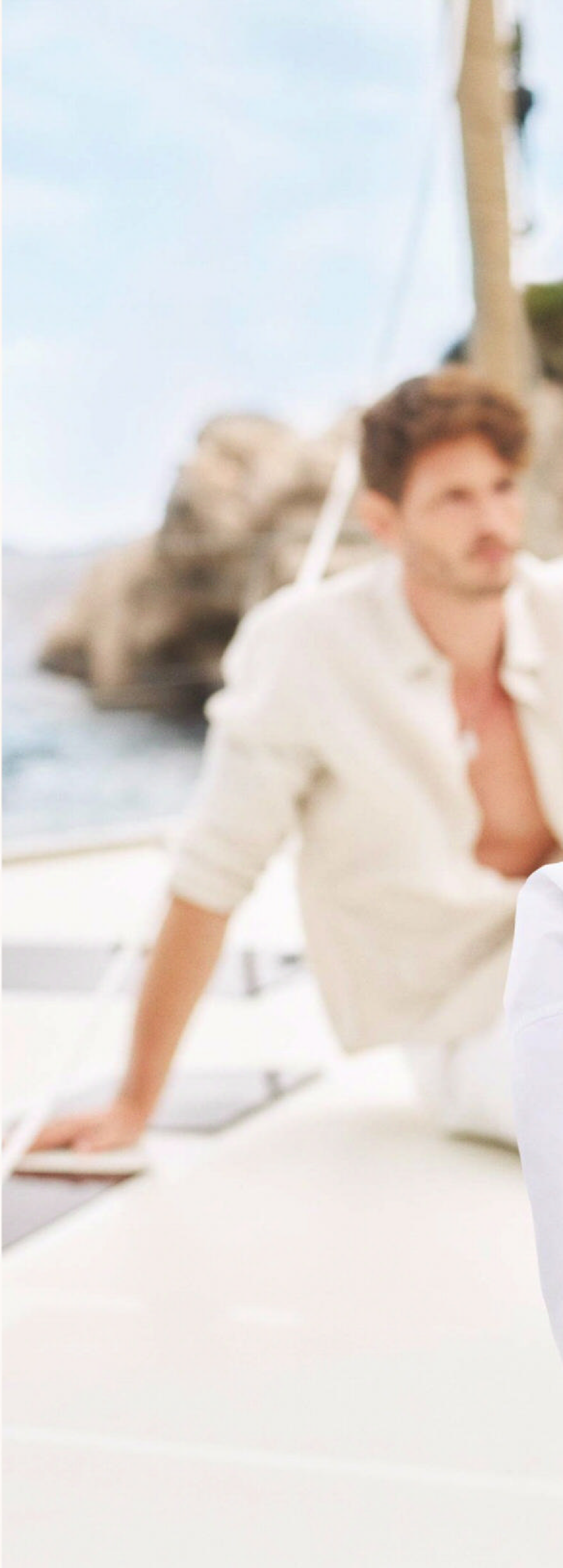

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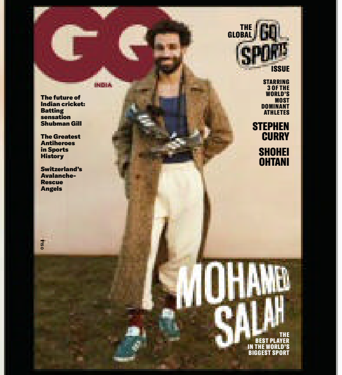
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MOHAMED SALAH

Photograph by Fanny Latour-Lambert. Styled by Jon Tietz. Coat by **Gucci.** Vintage tank top from **Melet Mercantile.** Pants by **Winnie New York.** Sneakers and cleats (worn around neck) by **Adidas.** Socks by **Adidas Originals.**

For our cover story on Mohamed Salah, see page 84.

Jacket by **Adidas Originals by Wales Bonner.** Turtleneck and pants by **Louis Vuitton Men's.** Bandana, stylist's own.

STYLIST: JON TIETZ.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **FANNY LATOUR-LAMBERT**

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For our cover story on Shohei Ohtani, see page 104.

Jacket by **ERL.** Turtleneck by **Boss.** Hat, his own.

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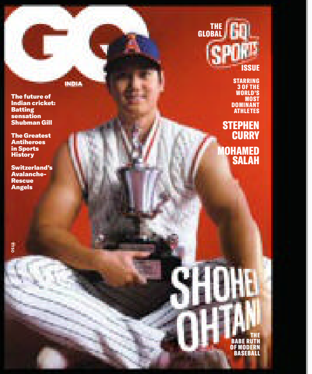

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THE BABE RUTH OF MODERN BASEBALL

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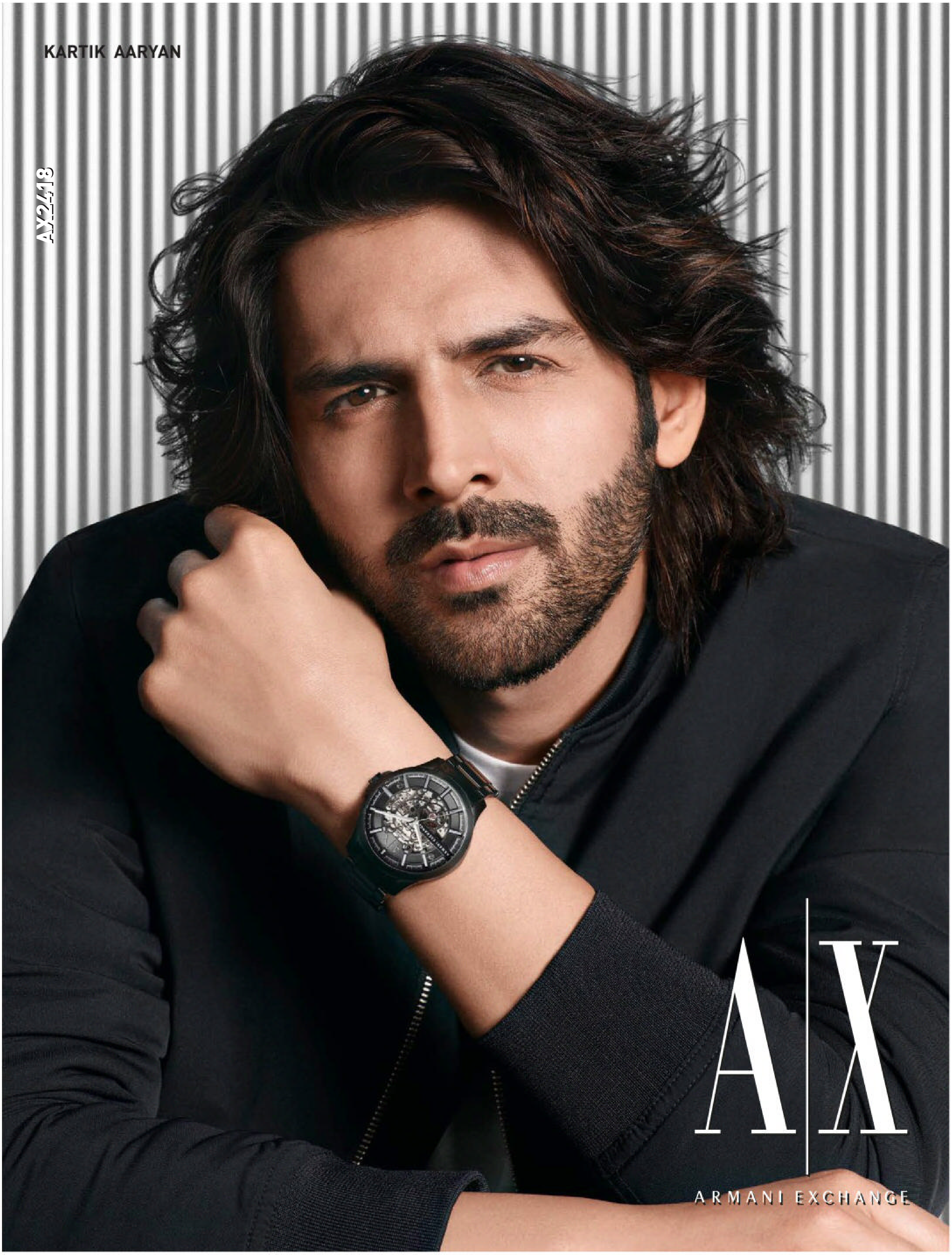
SHOHEI OHTANI

Photograph by Eli Russell Linnetz. Styled by Jon Tietz. Vest by **Gucci.** Pants and socks from **ABC Signature Costume.** His own cleats by **Asics.** Hat, his own.

STYLIST: JON TIETZ.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ELI RUSSELL LINNETZ**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ON THE COVER

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SHOHEI OHTANI
STEPHEN CURRY

STEPHEN CURRY

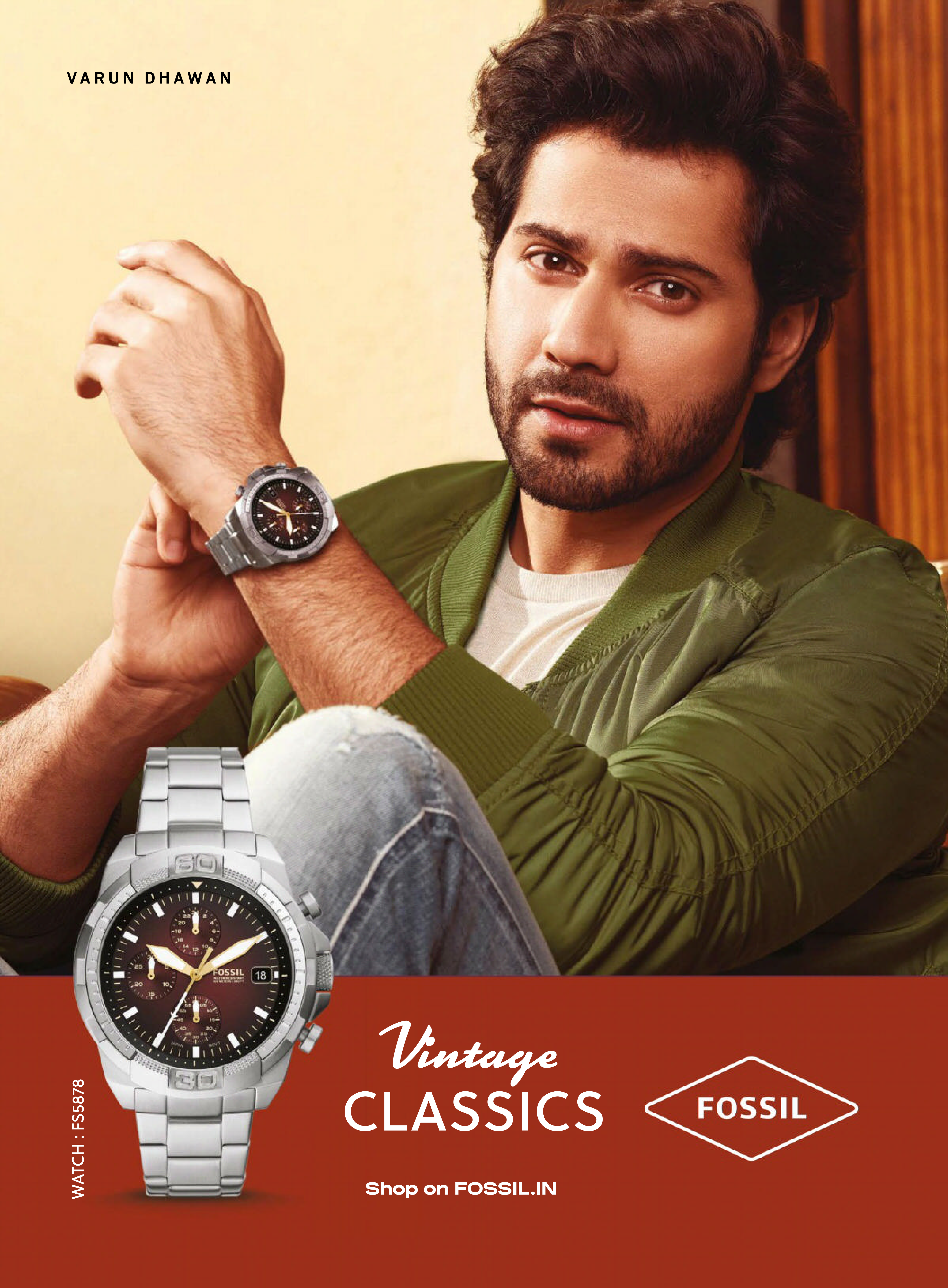
Photograph by Shaniqwa Jarvis. Styled by Mobolaji Dawodu. Coverall by **Levi's.** Shirt, his own. Shoes by **Birkenstock.** Hat by **Belstaff.** Watch by **Hublot.** Bracelet by **David Yurman.**

For our cover story on Stephen Curry, see page 94.

Jacket by **Homme Plissé Issey Miyake.** Sweater by **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello.**

STYLIST: MOBOLAJI DAWODU.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **SHANIQWA JARVIS**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Hawk Eye

THE BATTING UNIT of the Indian Test cricket team is on the brink of an intergenerational overhaul, with old warhorses likely to make way for fresh blood. One of the most exciting aspirants is Shubman Gill, the 22-year-old prodigy from Punjab, whose imperious 91 helped set up a historic win against Australia at the Gabba last winter. Gill's preternatural talents were first identified by his father, Lakhwinder, when he was just four, and by the time he was twelve he had top-scored 93 in a game that included professional cricketers who had played in the IPL, as well as for Punjab state. While he has recently struggled with form and injury since that imperious start, it is only a matter of time before this exciting opener takes centre stage. He also possesses real star quality—akin to a young Virat Kohli. Yet not much is known about him, with the media perhaps more focused on other emerging talent bubbling forth within the Indian camp. For this special sports issue, we commissioned sportswriter Jamie Alter to craft the first long-form profile of Gill. Some of us remember that it was Jamie's late father, Tom, who had interviewed a 16-year-old Sachin Tendulkar before he was picked for India—the first piece that launched the cherubic teenager into the national consciousness. While history does not repeat, it rhymes.

As a sports fan, this issue is a bona fide feast, with features and sketches on some of the world's most dominant, exciting sportspeople. Yet there is a special package that's especially worth highlighting: a list of the greatest sporting antiheroes, nominated by *GQ* editors across the globe. I've written a short vignette on the West Indian powerhouse Kieron Pollard, a short-format specialist whose ascent coincided with the rise of white-ball cricket. While he has been accused of being a soldier of fortune, prioritizing club over country, be sure that Pollard is going to torment us when he leads the West Indies against India in what promises to be an exciting series this month.

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Blazer, waistcoat, shirt, and trousers by **Line Out Line.**

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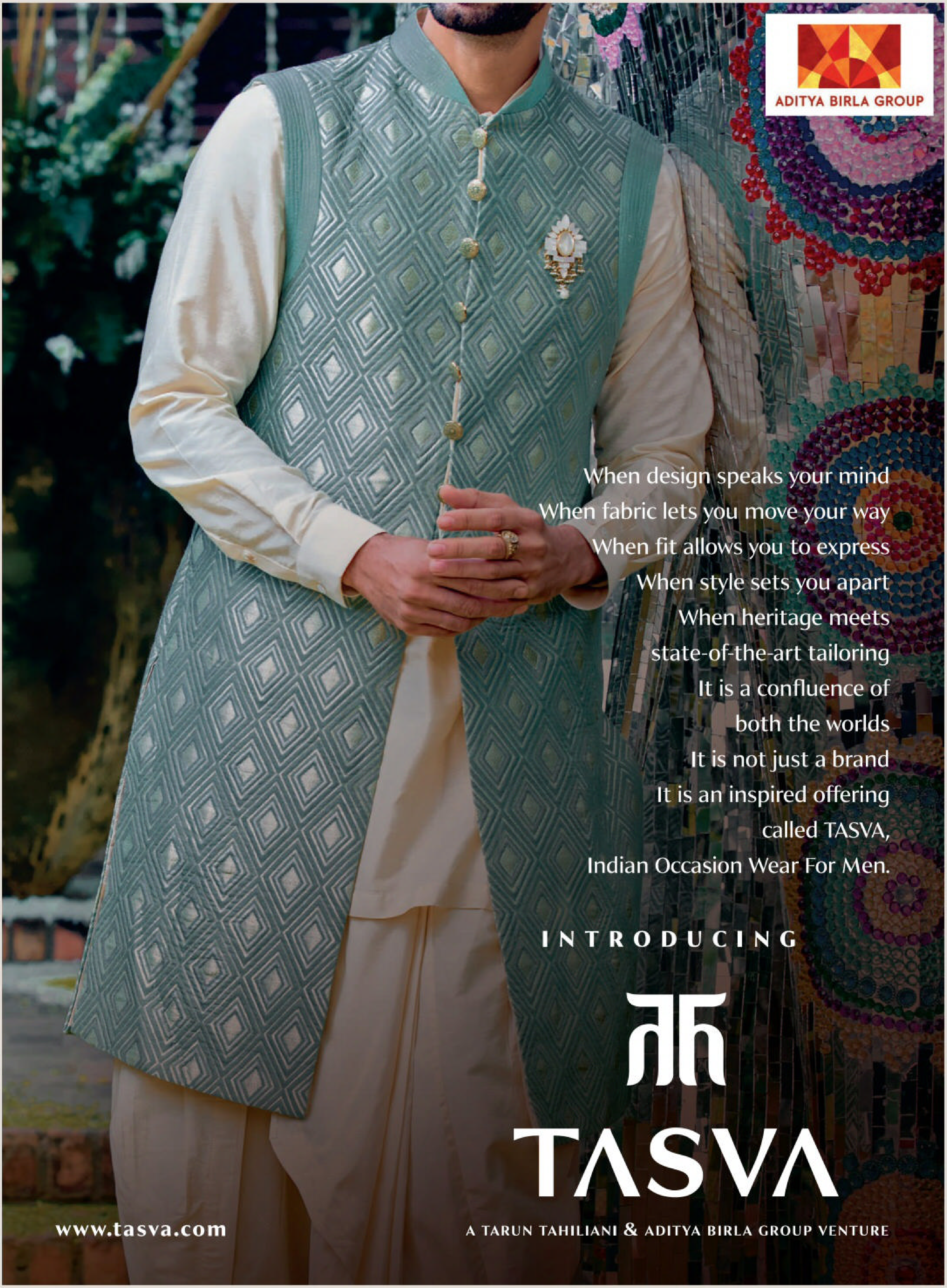

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GQ World

Drops

28 WAYS TO ACTIVATE YOUR WARDROBE

High fashion has never been more influenced by athletics, and workout gear has never looked more fly. We've got proof.

By SAMUEL HINE

THE NEW ATHLETICWEAR
Seven Strong (pictured here) and his Supreme-sponsored compatriots know better than anyone that skatewear has gone luxury. And now luxury—beefy **Fendi Men's** cashmere sweatsuits included—is right at home at the skate park, gym, and running trail.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **MARTIN BROWN**
STYLED BY **JON TIETZ**

OPENING PHOTOGRAPH: GROOMING, MELISSA DEZARATE FOR OMOROVICZA SKINCARE AND KEVIN MURPHY HAIRCARE. FOLLOWING PHOTOGRAPHS, THE NORTH FACE X GUCCI AND SAINT LAURENT: COURTESY OF BRANDS. ALL OTHER PHOTOGRAPHS: MARTIN BROWN; PROP STYLIST: SHARON RYAN FOR HALLEY RESOURCES.

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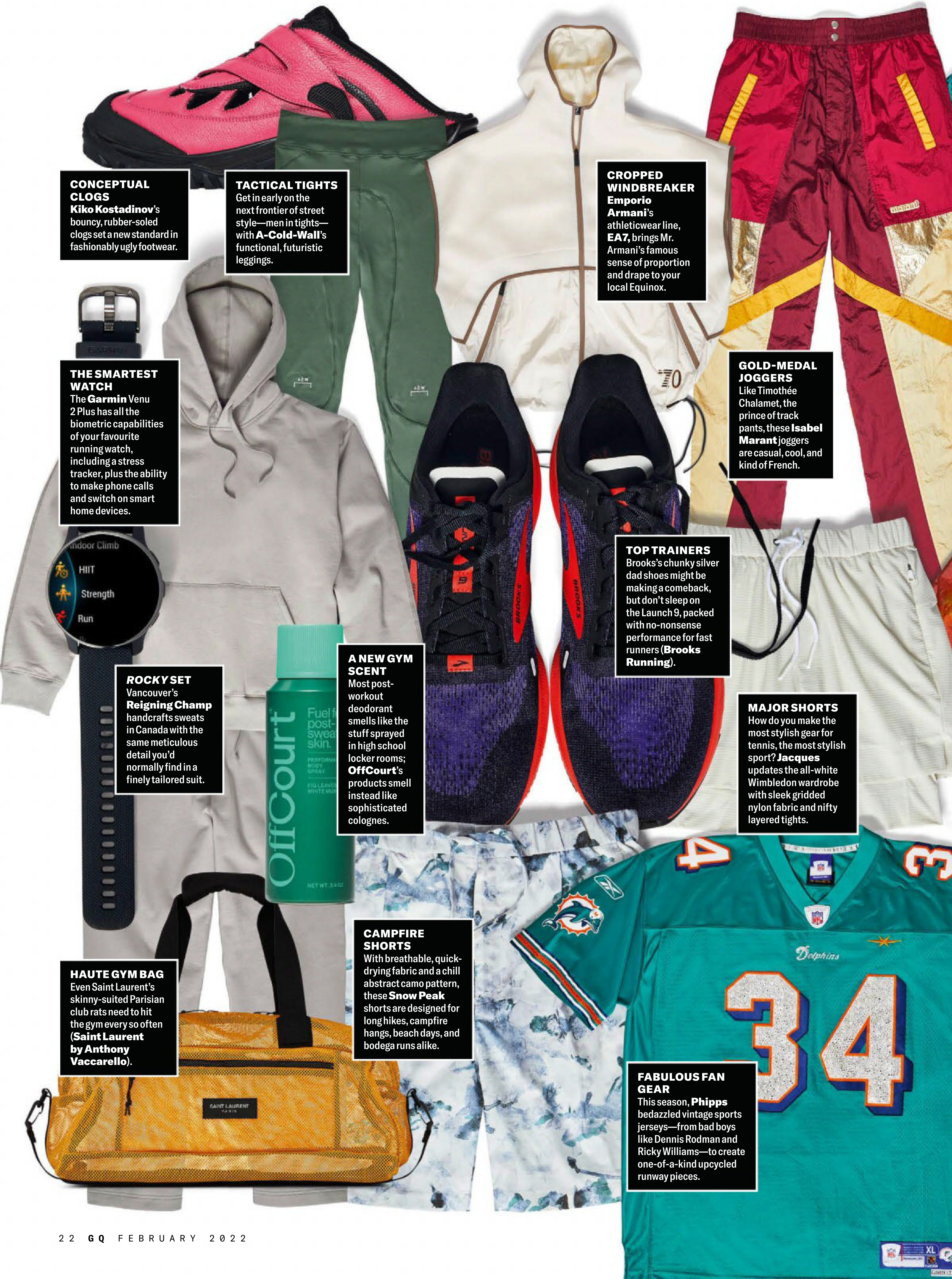


CONCEPTUAL CLOGS

Kiko Kostadinov's bouncy, rubber-soled clogs set a new standard in fashionably ugly footwear.

TACTICAL TIGHTS

Get in early on the next frontier of street style—men in tights—with **A-Cold-Wall**'s functional, futuristic leggings.

CROPPED WINDBREAKER

Emporio Armani's athleticwear line, **EA7**, brings Mr. Armani's famous sense of proportion and drape to your local Equinox.

THE SMARTEST WATCH

The **Garmin** Venu 2 Plus has all the biometric capabilities of your favourite running watch, including a stress tracker, plus the ability to make phone calls and switch on smart home devices.

GOLD-MEDAL JOGGERS

Like Timothée Chalamet, the prince of track pants, these **Isabel Marant** joggers are casual, cool, and kind of French.

TOP TRAINERS

Brooks's chunky silver dad shoes might be making a comeback, but don't sleep on the Launch 9, packed with no-nonsense performance for fast runners (**Brooks Running**).

ROCKY SET

Vancouver's **Reigning Champ** handcrafts sweats in Canada with the same meticulous detail you'd normally find in a finely tailored suit.

A NEW GYM SCENT

Most post-workout deodorant smells like the stuff sprayed in high school locker rooms; **OffCourt**'s products smell instead like sophisticated colognes.

MAJOR SHORTS

How do you make the most stylish gear for tennis, the most stylish sport? **Jacques** updates the all-white Wimbledon wardrobe with sleek gridded nylon fabric and nifty layered tights.

HAUTE GYM BAG

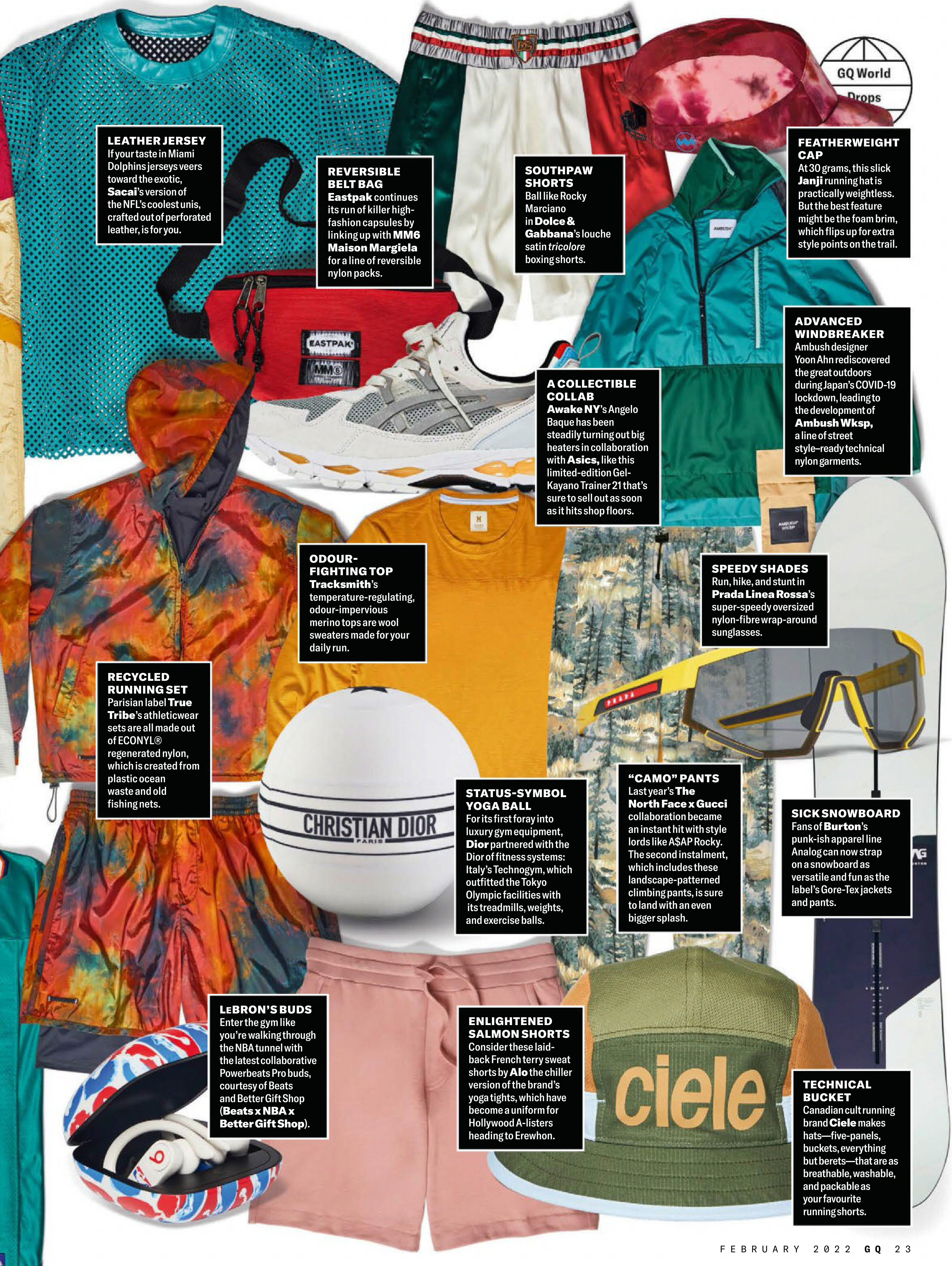
Even Saint Laurent's skinny-suited Parisian club rats need to hit the gym every so often (**Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello**).

CAMPFIRE SHORTS

With breathable, quick-drying fabric and a chill abstract camo pattern, these **Snow Peak** shorts are designed for long hikes, campfire hangs, beach days, and bodega runs alike.

FABULOUS FAN GEAR

This season, **Phipps** bedazzled vintage sports jerseys—from bad boys like Dennis Rodman and Ricky Williams—to create one-of-a-kind upcycled runway pieces.



LEATHER JERSEY

If your taste in Miami Dolphins jerseys veers toward the exotic, **Sacai**'s version of the NFL's coolest unis, crafted out of perforated leather, is for you.

REVERSIBLE BELT BAG

Eastpak continues its run of killer high-fashion capsules by linking up with **MM6 Maison Margiela** for a line of reversible nylon packs.

SOUTHPAW SHORTS

Ball like Rocky Marciano in **Dolce & Gabbana**'s louche satin *tricolore* boxing shorts.

FEATHERWEIGHT CAP

At 30 grams, this slick **Janji** running hat is practically weightless. But the best feature might be the foam brim, which flips up for extra style points on the trail.

ADVANCED WINDBREAKER

Ambush designer Yoon Ahn rediscovered the great outdoors during Japan's COVID-19 lockdown, leading to the development of **Ambush Wksp,** a line of street style–ready technical nylon garments.

A COLLECTIBLE COLLAB

Awake NY's Angelo Baque has been steadily turning out big heaters in collaboration with **Asics,** like this limited-edition Gel-Kayano Trainer 21 that's sure to sell out as soon as it hits shop floors.

ODOUR-FIGHTING TOP

Tracksmith's temperature-regulating, odour-impervious merino tops are wool sweaters made for your daily run.

SPEEDY SHADES

Run, hike, and stunt in **Prada Linea Rossa**'s super-speedy oversized nylon-fibre wrap-around sunglasses.

RECYCLED RUNNING SET

Parisian label **True Tribe**'s athleticwear sets are all made out of ECONYL® regenerated nylon, which is created from plastic ocean waste and old fishing nets.

STATUS-SYMBOL YOGA BALL

For its first foray into luxury gym equipment, **Dior** partnered with the Dior of fitness systems: Italy's Technogym, which outfitted the Tokyo Olympic facilities with its treadmills, weights, and exercise balls.

"CAMO" PANTS

Last year's **The North Face x Gucci** collaboration became an instant hit with style lords like A$AP Rocky. The second instalment, which includes these landscape-patterned climbing pants, is sure to land with an even bigger splash.

SICK SNOWBOARD

Fans of **Burton**'s punk-ish apparel line Analog can now strap on a snowboard as versatile and fun as the label's Gore-Tex jackets and pants.

LEBRON'S BUDS

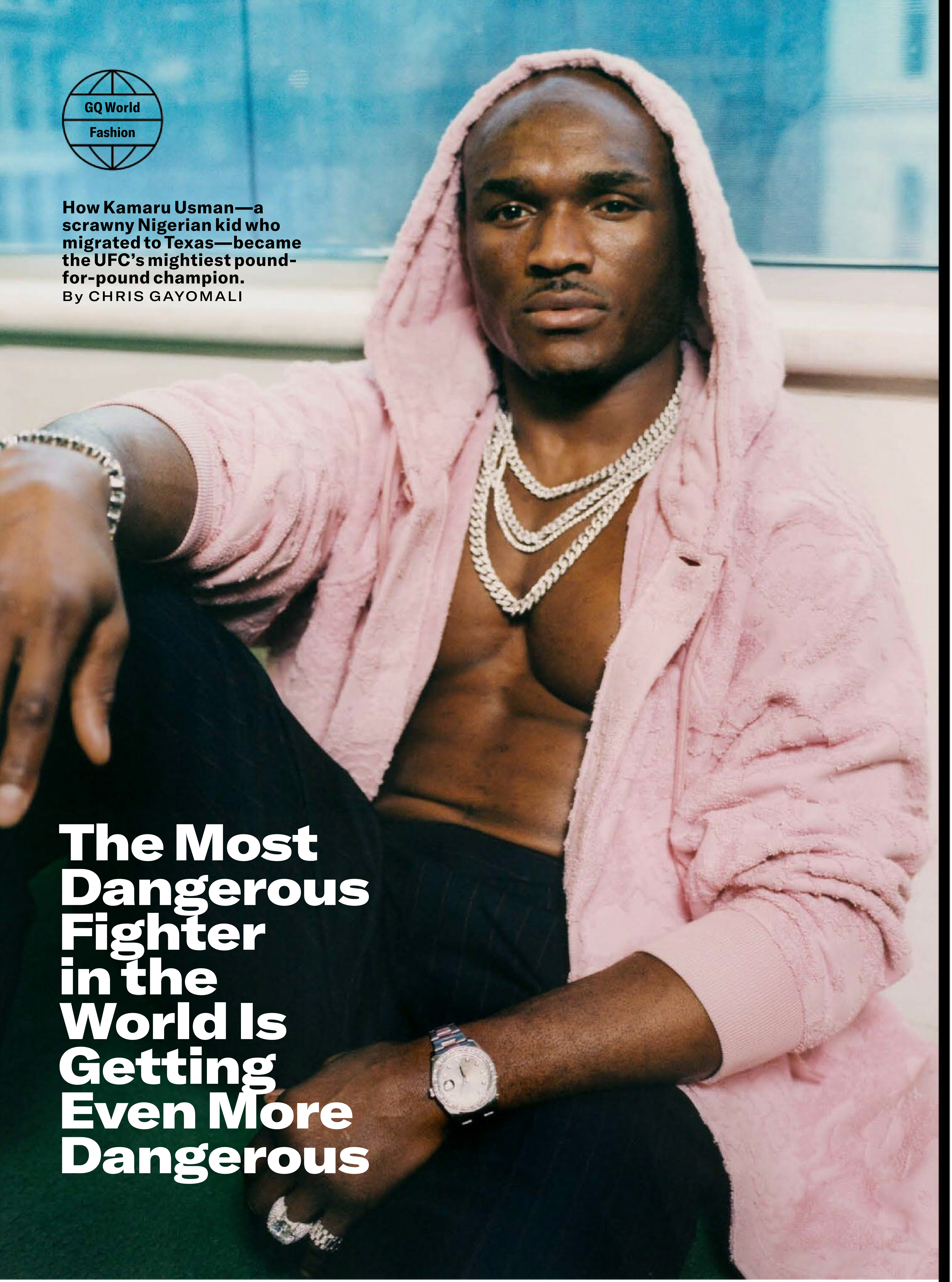
Enter the gym like you're walking through the NBA tunnel with the latest collaborative Powerbeats Pro buds, courtesy of Beats and Better Gift Shop (**Beats x NBA x Better Gift Shop**).

ENLIGHTENED SALMON SHORTS

Consider these laid-back French terry sweat shorts by **Alo** the chiller version of the brand's yoga tights, which have become a uniform for Hollywood A-listers heading to Erewhon.

TECHNICAL BUCKET

Canadian cult running brand **Ciele** makes hats—five-panels, buckets, everything but berets—that are as breathable, washable, and packable as your favourite running shorts.



GQ World Fashion

The Most Dangerous Fighter in the World Is Getting Even More Dangerous

How Kamaru Usman—a scrawny Nigerian kid who migrated to Texas—became the UFC's mightiest pound-for-pound champion.

By CHRIS GAYOMALI

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ANDRE D. WAGNER**
STYLED BY **MOBOLAJI DAWODU**

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THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION FOR BESPOKE MENSWEAR

Sophisticated. Understated. Polished. A well-tailored outfit is every man's wardrobe staple and will never go out of style. And if there is one label that offers a quintessential mix of effortless-yet-polished bespoke menswear outfits, it is The Darzi Group. Founded in 1981 and helmed by father-son duo Sunil and Sushain Mital, the Group's legacy of measured precision in tailored menswear is evident in its offerings – from formal suits and tuxedos to bandhgalas. No surprises then that the brand played a pivotal role in introducing Italian fabrics to the Indian market.

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STUDIO FIRANG

GQ World Fashion

ONE OF THE things that separates Kamaru Usman—the UFC welterweight champion and world number one pound-for-pound—from other fighters is the sublime efficiency of his tool kit. Take his second-scariest punch: the right cross.

He landed a big one last year on Jorge Masvidal to close out their second UFC fight. The shot was the result of a hand trap that Kamaru had been meticulously plotting since the first round, in which he used his left hand to yank Jorge's right arm away from his head, and when the cross was deployed, Kamaru really committed and threw all his weight behind it, stepping through the punch like he was the Kool-Aid Man and there were thirsty children on the other side. The set-up was flawlessly executed. Beautiful maths. The punch cracked poor Jorge so hard that his body went limp and the sweat from his brow flung itself into the air and instantly phase-changed into a cloud of ghostly vapour. On television the effect resembled something like a spirit leaving its corporeal form, ascending to heaven.

But Kamaru Usman's *real* best punch is actually his jab, which he can throw with either hand and might be the best jab in all of mixed martial arts: precise, off-rhythm, rangy, with the percussive power of a train piston behind it. It juts out with zero tell, like a cuckoo from a broken clock. Most fighters use their jabs to probe; to distract; to set up other, more damaging follow-up blows. But the thing about Kamaru is that he can also *finish* you with his jab—as he did in a title defense last year against Gilbert Burns, a former training partner, whose neck is as thick as a fire hydrant. Kamaru's southpaw jab squeaked in between Gilbert's guard and snapped his head back, causing him to fall onto his backside, where he was soon finished.

The thing is: Kamaru isn't even really *known* as a striker. For a long time he was known mostly as a wrestler who would rag doll his opponents around the cage like a labradoodle given a chew toy. His jab is instructive because it illustrates who he is: devastatingly effective, yet incomplete. "It's not like his jab is mastered yet, and that's what makes it fun," says Trevor Wittman, Kamaru's coach of almost two years, who is known in MMA circles as a cheery Yoda. "There's so much you can do with the fundamentals that takes years and years and years to understand. A lot of people go out and they work on these fancy moves that will hardly ever work. They're very easy to see. But if you sit there, and you polish, and you focus on fundamentals, and you continue to drill them, you become a master at the fundamentals. And that's what makes world champions."

Which is what Kamaru is: a world champion. But he's more than that, at this point. Twenty wins in 21 bouts, the last six being title fights against the scariest welterweights on earth. He's beaten everyone notable in his division—a few of them twice already. He's a cerebral tactician and a sui generis athlete who doesn't get tired—an All-American collegiate wrestler who's never been taken down. He even entered his most recent rematch against Colby Covington, the closest thing he's had to a true rival, with a slight handicap: Kamaru broke his right hand three weeks before the fight. Couldn't even punch with it during training camp. "I didn't throw the right until fight night, so that's why the timing was off with it," says Kamaru, showing me his mangled hand. His ring finger is swollen like an overboiled hot dog.

It's a warm November evening just three days after the second Covington fight, and we're eating dinner at a fancy French brasserie in Lower Manhattan. Kamaru hasn't had a drink in eight, nine months, he estimates, but decides to celebrate and order a Casamigos margarita. In person he's a modest six feet and wears a mustard yellow beanie with a green letterman jacket bearing his nickname, The Nigerian Nightmare. Underneath is a black Gym King tee that hugs his biceps so snugly it's as

OPENING PAGE
Hoodie and pants by **Prada.** His own watch and necklace (third from top) from **Happy Jewelers.** Necklace (top) and ring (on pinkie) by **Shay Jewelry.** Necklace (second from top) from **Manhattan Buyers Inc.** Necklace (bottom), bracelet, and ring (on ring finger), by **Jacob & Co.**

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP
Shirt by **Dolce & Gabbana.** Tank top by **Calvin Klein Underwear.** Pants by **Homme Plissé Issey Miyake.** Shoes by **Sabah.** Watch by **Cartier.** Necklace from **Manhattan Buyers Inc.** Bracelet by **Jacob & Co.** Ring by **Tiffany & Co.**

OPPOSITE PAGE, BOTTOM
Pullover by **Paul Smith.** Shoes by **Sabah.** Sunglasses by **Ahlem.** Watch by **Cartier.** Necklace, bracelet, and ring (on right hand) by **Shay Jewelry.** Ring (on left hand) by **O Thongthai.**

THIS PAGE
Robe by **Missoni.** Turtleneck and pants by **Botter.** Belt by **Paul Smith.** His own watch from **Happy Jewelers.** Necklace and bracelet from **Manhattan Buyers Inc.**

if a full-size sheet got pulled over a queen-size bed. Despite having just fought in a caged death match a few nights ago, his face is immaculate, as if he was barely touched.

Fighting, particularly in MMA, is an endless series of internal flowcharts that athletes are computing in real time. You're throwing kicks and punches and feints, gauging reactions, reacting to reactions of reactions of reactions while trying to not get hit yourself, all within fractions of a second. In the sport, Kamaru is something of an oddity. He might not be the most dynamic active striker (that would be his friend and Nigerian brother Israel Adesanya) or the hardest hitter (his Cameroonian brother Francis Ngannou) or even the best grappler (the recently retired Khabib Nurmagomedov, another close friend). But he's pretty fucking great at nearly everything, and puts it all together in a way that makes him one of the most complete fighters we've seen, perhaps ever, on a tier with names like Jon Jones and Georges St-Pierre.

Aside from his battles with Covington, none of Kamaru's fights have been particularly close. His only loss was in 2013—his second pro fight ever—and since then we've seen him not only dominate nearly every opponent but emerge as a somehow newer and nastier version of himself with every scrap. His ability to level up is unreal. The most dumbfounding thing about Kamaru is you get the sense he's still nowhere near his ceiling.

"For me, it's like I *haaave* to improve," says Kamaru. To be at the same level he was yesterday or, God forbid, a tiny bit worse, bothers him to no end. Ordinarily this would strike as a typical athlete cliché. With Kamaru, though, you feel like it really does manifest as a deep, almost puerile annoyance; the guy is a little monastic and can be unusually hard on himself. Trevor Wittman says sometimes he'll walk into the facility in Denver where they train as Kamaru is warming up, and everything will be quiet. "I'll be like, 'Hey, how come we don't got your music on?'" says Wittman. "And he's like, 'I don't *get* music today.' It's just funny that he's one of those guys that will discipline himself, be truthful to it, and not waste any time."

It's a funny thing, being the best in the world. Definitionally, it's lonely at the top, rarefied air. The big question now facing Kamaru is: What does progress look like once you've seemingly reached the summit—and left a trail of broken bodies in your wake? If you're him, it means inventing new challenges. It means locating harder, more dangerous mountains to scale—searching for situations where things can go wrong.

SHOULD YOU EVER look up Auchi, Nigeria, on Wikipedia—before you get to the sections on language and geography—you will notice a brief yet important line right near the very top: "UFC Welterweight Champion, Kamaru Usman was born in Auchi."

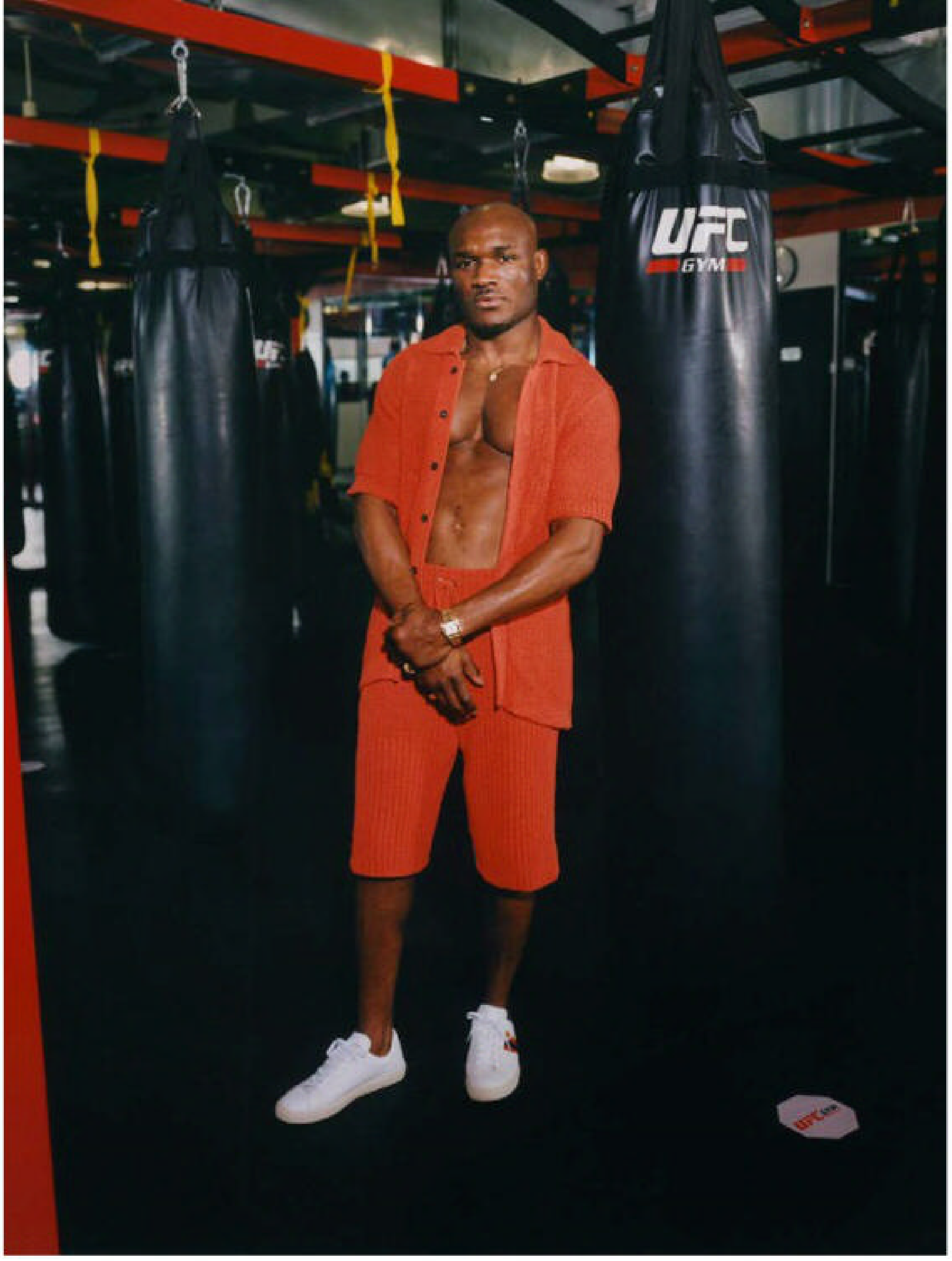
His father, Muhammed, wasn't around much when he was a kid growing up there; Dad was already in the States, building out his ambulance business in Texas. The Usman kids mostly knew him as a disembodied voice who'd sometimes reprimand them on the phone should they step out of line with their mother. "We knew we had a dad," Kamaru remembers of those early years. "I just couldn't picture his face as a kid."

When Kamaru was eight, Muhammed brought the family to Arlington, Texas.

Young Kamaru played the trumpet. "I was one of those dudes where I could be first chair any given day," he says. Smooth jazz is still his favourite genre of music, though he's a big fan of Afrobeats and counts Nigerian artists like Wizkid and Burna Boy among his friends. Throughout middle school he played football, but then he entered high school and suddenly found himself in the precarious position of being undersized. "My freshman year, I was five foot two, 103 pounds," he says. One day at practice he got trucked pretty hard by a much bigger kid, and "that was the end of my football career".

On a particularly hot morning during marching-band practice, Kamaru snuck into the school to get a drink at the water fountain, where he was caught by a wrestling coach. They struck up a conversation, and the coach asked him if he'd considered giving wrestling a shot. "At this point we've been watching like Stone Cold Steve Austin," says Kamaru. "So I'm like, 'Nah. I'm not trying to get hit with chairs.'"

The wrestling coach left the door open for Kamaru to join. One thing led to another, Kamaru showed up for practice, and he was immediately placed into a small group to rumble. "Mine was a group of four," he adds. "And we had a girl."



THIS PAGE
Shirt and shorts by **Salvatore Ferragamo.** Sneakers by **Paul Smith.** Watch by **Cartier.** Necklace and rings by **Shay Jewelry.**

OPPOSITE PAGE
Shirt by **Versace.** Tank top by **Calvin Klein Underwear.** Pants by **Botter.** Belt by **Paul Smith.** Sandals by **Dolce & Gabbana.** Watch by **Omega.**

This girl, as he tells it, "just fucked us *up*. Took me down. Slammed me. Put me in moves I didn't even know. I couldn't get away. I didn't know what to do." After getting mauled all practice, young Kamaru made the long walk home feeling humiliated. "It was such a humbling experience," he says. "And it messed with me so much. When I was walking home, the only thing I could think about was"—and here he flashes a grin—"'I'm going to fuck that girl up tomorrow.'"

So he went in the next day, furious and determined to do better, except: "She whooped my ass. And I came back [the next day], she whooped my ass again."

This went on for a long while—three, four weeks of getting straight bodied by this girl. Then one day Kamaru finally managed to not totally suck: He snagged her in a move he'd just learned, a headlock, and somehow he was able to hold her there. The coaches smiled at him from across the room. Achievement unlocked. Elation. "I remember that day I was walking home, I was like, 'I *learned* something. I actually *learned* something.' I worked through it, and I learned."

And that girl? Turns out she was a three-time state champion. "I'm sure she tells the story now," he says, laughing.

As a wrestler, Kamaru Usman became obsessed and rose through the ranks quickly. Watched a ton of videos. Just worked his tail off, internalizing lessons from his coaches, and within a few years fashioned himself into an NCAA All-American at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. "He is so damn coachable," Wittman tells me. "Fighters are very selfish. They're very driven with ego. But the guy listens to everything I say, and that's something you don't find a lot in this industry."

In 2010 his father was convicted on multiple criminal charges related to his businesses, including healthcare fraud—charges that the Usmans dispute to this day. (Muhammed was sent to prison and recently released early for good behaviour.) "All my life I was kind of put in a position to not depend on my dad," Kamaru has said. "I was never one of those kids to say, 'My dad doesn't love me because he didn't come to my wrestling meet.' I knew who my dad was, and I knew he loved me."

Truth is, his parents didn't even know he wrestled his first two years of high school. Kamaru hadn't bothered telling them. "Because you know parents: 'You're going to be a doctor. You're going to be this. You're going to be that,'" Kamaru tells me. "So I hid it from them until my mom caught me on TV. I was wrestling in the city finals on local television, and she saw me. I came home, and she was telling my dad and screaming."

To his great surprise, Mom wasn't even mad: "It was like, 'Did you see our son? He was on television!'"

ALL THE GREAT ones need a foil, someone who challenges them to be the best version of themselves, and for Kamaru Usman, that counterweight is Covington, who exists as a kind of turbocharged, shit-talking MAGA heel.

With similar wrestling bona fides and relentless cardio, Covington has become a great yang for the more soft-spoken Kamaru's yin. But he has antagonized Kamaru with threats that have veered into racism—or at the very least made it seem as if Covington was blowing a dog whistle the size of a sousaphone. He has said that Usman comes from a "little tribe" that uses "smoke signals", and he refers to Kamaru as "Marty" (the name given to him by a white wrestling coach who couldn't pronounce his name).

I suggest to Kamaru that Covington is able to say stuff that no Black athlete could ever get away with.

"Absolutely not," he says. "But he *has* to do that. He doesn't have the luxury to just be himself, like I am."

Why do you think that is?

"I mean, he created a monster, you know? He started telling everyone, 'Well, I'm playing a character because they were going to cut me.' He wanted to break it. He wanted to drop it. But he just couldn't. People already hated him. Now it's like, you got to double down and lean into it if you are ever going to make money in this sport."

At the end of your last fight, he seemed to briefly break character finally. What did he say to you?

"I couldn't really hear, but he was a real person. He was a genuine person. And I was like, 'Oh, shit.'" A few minutes later, Covington was back to talking shit in a press conference.

Kamaru is not a fan of the UFC's recent oscillation toward pro wrestling cartoonishness, where a big mouth means bigger money. "Conor McGregor is a perfect example," he says. "Completely ignore the respect aspect and you get super famous. How do you tell these kids nowadays, 'Hey, respect is the most important thing,' when they can be super-rich and famous like Conor?"

Most fighters look for new challenges by moving up a weight class. But Kamaru insists he'll never fight Israel Adesanya, his Nigerian brother who currently lords over the middleweight division. Instead, Kamaru says he spent a chunk of last year contemplating something more radical: moving up *two* whole weight classes to light heavyweight—basically unheard of in MMA—to fight a much, much larger man in Jan Blachowicz for that title.

"I was going to skip Israel and go fight Jan at 205 [pounds]," says Kamaru, suddenly animated. Even discussing the prospect of tangling with a giant grizzled Polish guy who outweighs him by 40 pounds has Kamaru basically salivating. "Because I'm pound-for-pound, I want to prove it. No matter what weight it is, I thought he was a really good matchup for me."

For the time being, though, it's a battle that remains theoretical. In October, Blachowicz lost his world title in an upset to Glover Teixeira, putting any would-be Kamaru challenge on hold. Still, Kamaru remains intrigued—and unfazed. Never mind the fact that Blachowicz is bigger, stronger, more powerful. "I think I would beat him," he tells me matter-of-factly.

And if he loses? At least he'll have opened up a whole new world of scary challenges for himself. And for Kamaru, nothing could be more thrilling. ⁂

CHRIS GAYOMALI *is a* GQ *articles editor.*

The reigning welterweight champ, photographed at UFC Gym SoHo in New York City.

UNBOX THE EXTRAORDINARY

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10. **Skechers,** ₹8,000.
11. **Asics,** ₹5,500.

GQ TIP

A neutral pair of kicks is an invitation to play up the colour with the rest of your look. Team them with a graphic tee, or a pastel suit for an easy-formal vibe.

A sure-fire way to head into the year with a spring in your step? Sneakers that make it feel like you're walking on air. Whether you're into coke whites or printed plimsolls, these lace-ups will have your 2022 fits sorted.

1

2

PRINTS & POP HUES

Playing it safe isn't your M.O.? Then statement sneakers will serve you well; think big on colour and un-shy with prints.

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2. **Louis Vuitton,** ₹98,500.
3. **Hermès,** price on request.
4. **Prada,** price on request.
5. **Tod's,** price on request.
6. **Puma,** ₹9,000.
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8. **Christian Louboutin,** price on request.
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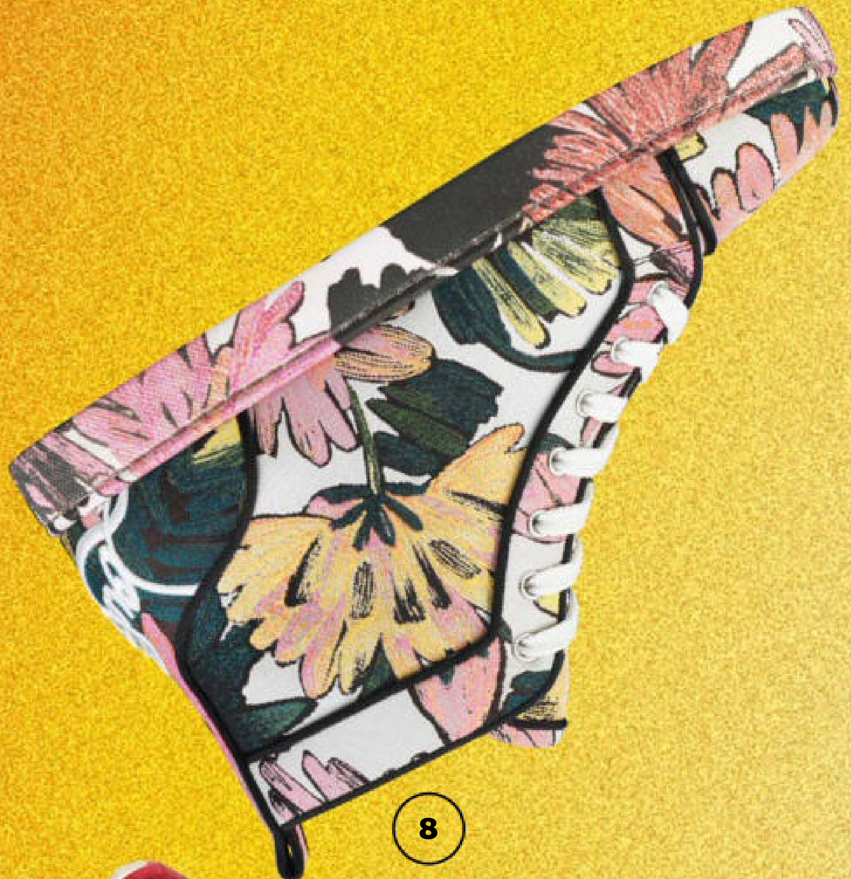
11. **Bottega Veneta,** ₹1,10,000.



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HERMES: STUDIO DES FLEURS.

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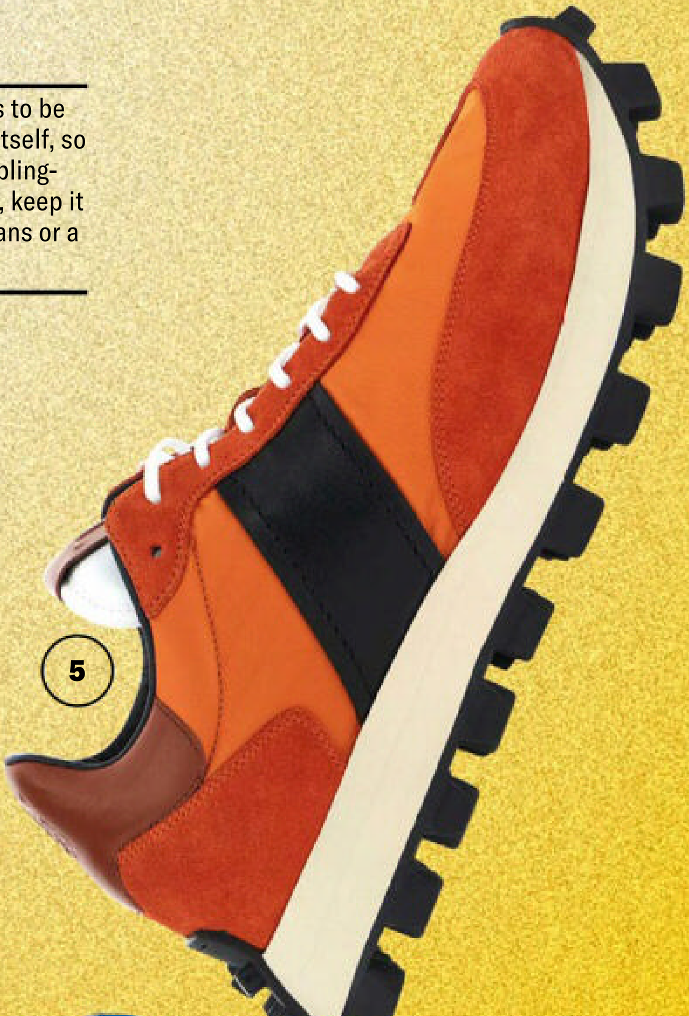
GQ TIP

A printed pair tends to be an anchor piece in itself, so unless your vibe is bling-bling-and-shine-on, keep it simple with dark jeans or a neutral sweatsuit.

10

Paul Smith
vibram



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What You Can Learn From the Ageless Athlete

A wellness revolution in pro sports has allowed stars like LeBron James, Tom Brady, and Novak Djokovic to continue to dominate into (relative) old age. *GQ* fitness columnist Joe Holder breaks down the moves you can steal for yourself.

LEBRON JAMES: OLDER, ROCKY WIDNER/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES; YOUNGER, STEVE GRAYSON/WIREIMAGE; HANDS, GARY DINEEN/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES.

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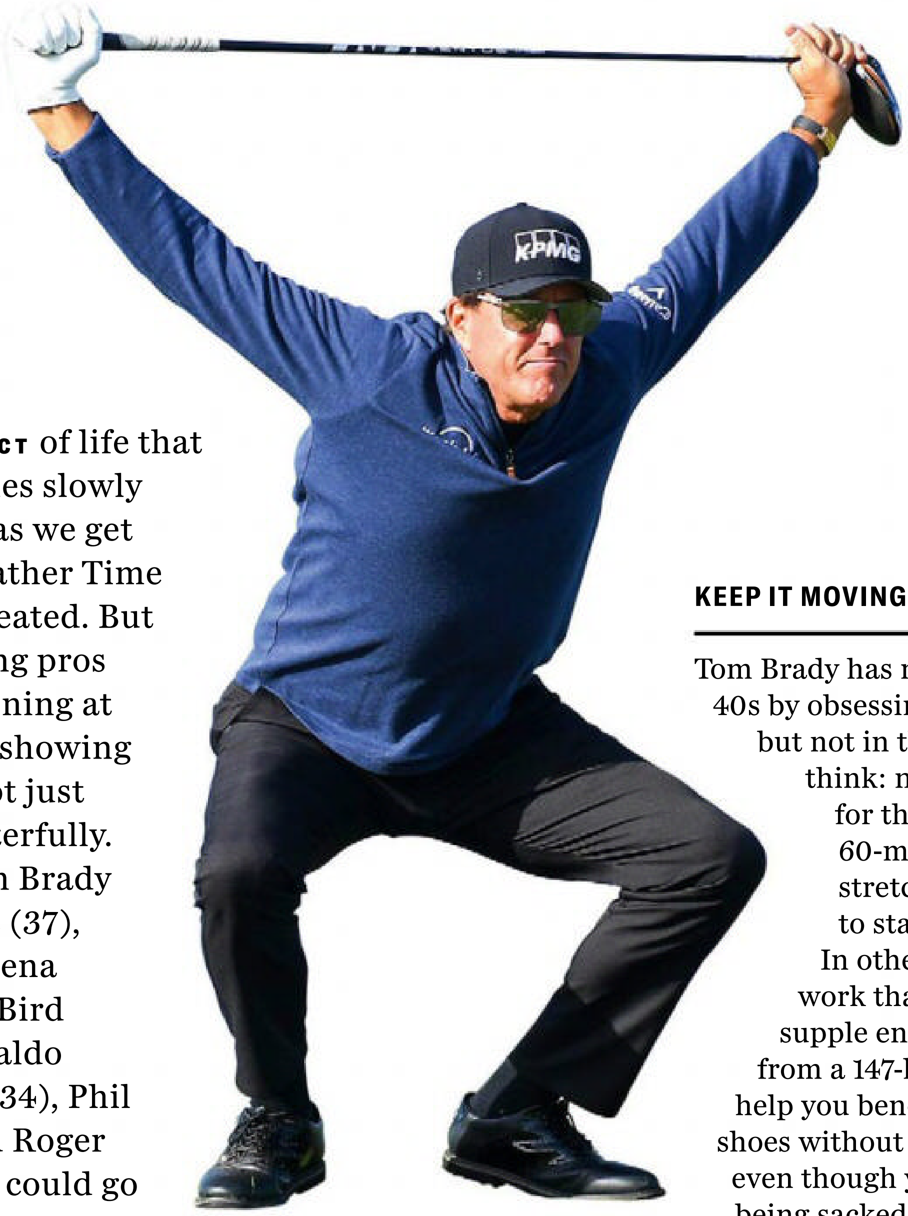
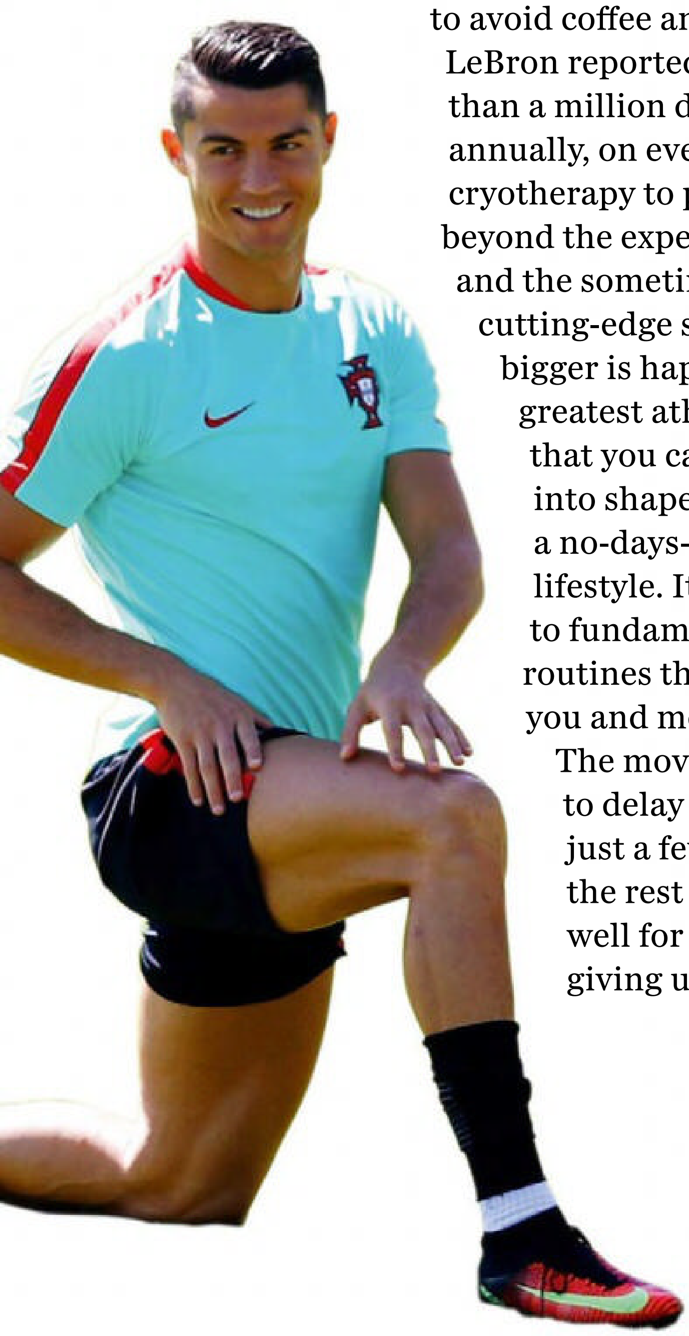


It's a fact of life that our bodies slowly decline as we get older; Father Time is undefeated. But a new wave of ageing pros competing and winning at the highest level is showing how you can age not just gracefully but masterfully. I'm thinking of Tom Brady (44), LeBron James (37), Chris Paul (36), Serena Williams (40), Sue Bird (41), Cristiano Ronaldo (36), Lionel Messi (34), Phil Mickelson (51), and Roger Federer (40). And I could go on: It's not just one sport, or a few outliers, or veterans transitioning into supporting roles. It's a sports-wide revolution.

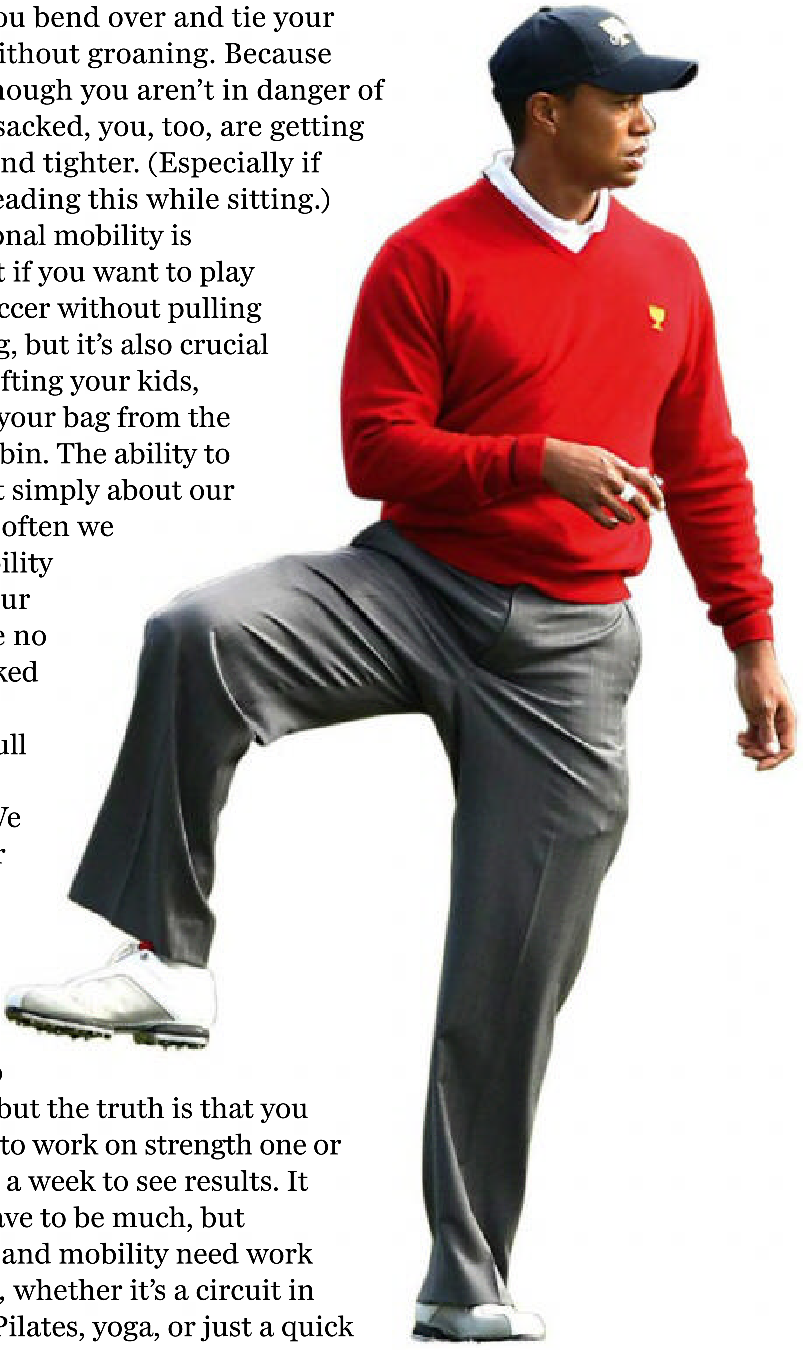
And you may have heard about the out-there things they're doing to maintain their bodies: Brady has so optimized his nutrition that he tries to avoid coffee and even tomatoes. LeBron reportedly spends more than a million dollars on his body annually, on everything from cryotherapy to pedicures. But beyond the expensive equipment and the sometimes dubious cutting-edge science, something bigger is happening: The greatest athletes are realizing that you can't play your way into shape; performance is a no-days-off, year-round lifestyle. It's the commitment to fundamental, practical routines that amateurs like you and me can learn from. The moves pros are using to delay their twilight by just a few years can help the rest of us feel and live well for decades—without giving up tomatoes.



KEEP IT MOVING

Tom Brady has ruled the NFL into his 40s by obsessing over his muscles, but not in the way you might think: not pumping iron for the strength to throw 60-metre bombs but by stretching and foam rolling to stay flexible and mobile. In other words, the same work that keeps his body supple enough to absorb a tackle from a 147-kilogram lineman can help you bend over and tie your shoes without groaning. Because even though you aren't in danger of being sacked, you, too, are getting older and tighter. (Especially if you're reading this while sitting.)

Functional mobility is important if you want to play pickup soccer without pulling something, but it's also crucial for life—lifting your kids, grabbing your bag from the overhead bin. The ability to move isn't simply about our muscles—often we lose flexibility because our brains are no longer asked to work through full ranges of motion. We often hear the phrase "use it or lose it" and apply it to strength, but the truth is that you only have to work on strength one or two times a week to see results. It doesn't have to be much, but flexibility and mobility need work *every day,* whether it's a circuit in the gym, Pilates, yoga, or just a quick stretch before bed.



Opening page: LeBron James in high school at 18 and this season with the L.A. Lakers at 36. *These pages, clockwise from top left*: Phil Mickelson, now 51; Serena Williams (40); Chris Paul (36); Tom Brady (44); Tiger Woods (46); and Cristiano Ronaldo (36).

FOOD IS FUEL

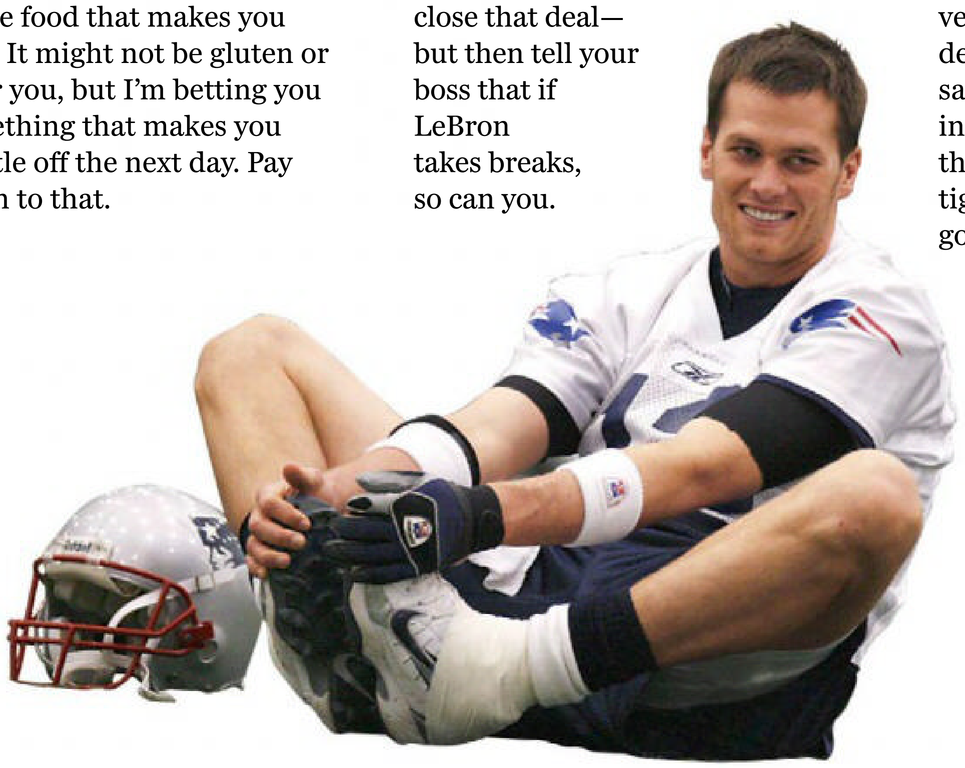
Last year, at an ancient-for-tennis 34, Novak Djokovic had the best season of his career, coming within one match of becoming the first man to complete the Grand Slam since 1969. He credits his longevity in large part to overhauling his diet: In 2010, he eliminated gluten and dairy and sharply restricted sugar. That's an extreme example, but the days of athletes eating whatever they want in the off-season or finding a few beers in their lockers after games are long gone.

You don't have an off season, but the point is the same: Creating a healthy—and, most of all, *consistent*—approach to food is more powerful than supplements or on-again-off-again dieting. It can be tempting to think of food as a reward you get for working out. But it's better to treat food as an integral part of your larger wellness picture. Figure out what you want your food to do for you and design an eating strategy around that. Here's a place to start: Try to simply minimize food that makes you feel bad. It might not be gluten or dairy for you, but I'm betting you eat something that makes you feel a little off the next day. Pay attention to that.

TAKE A TIME-OUT

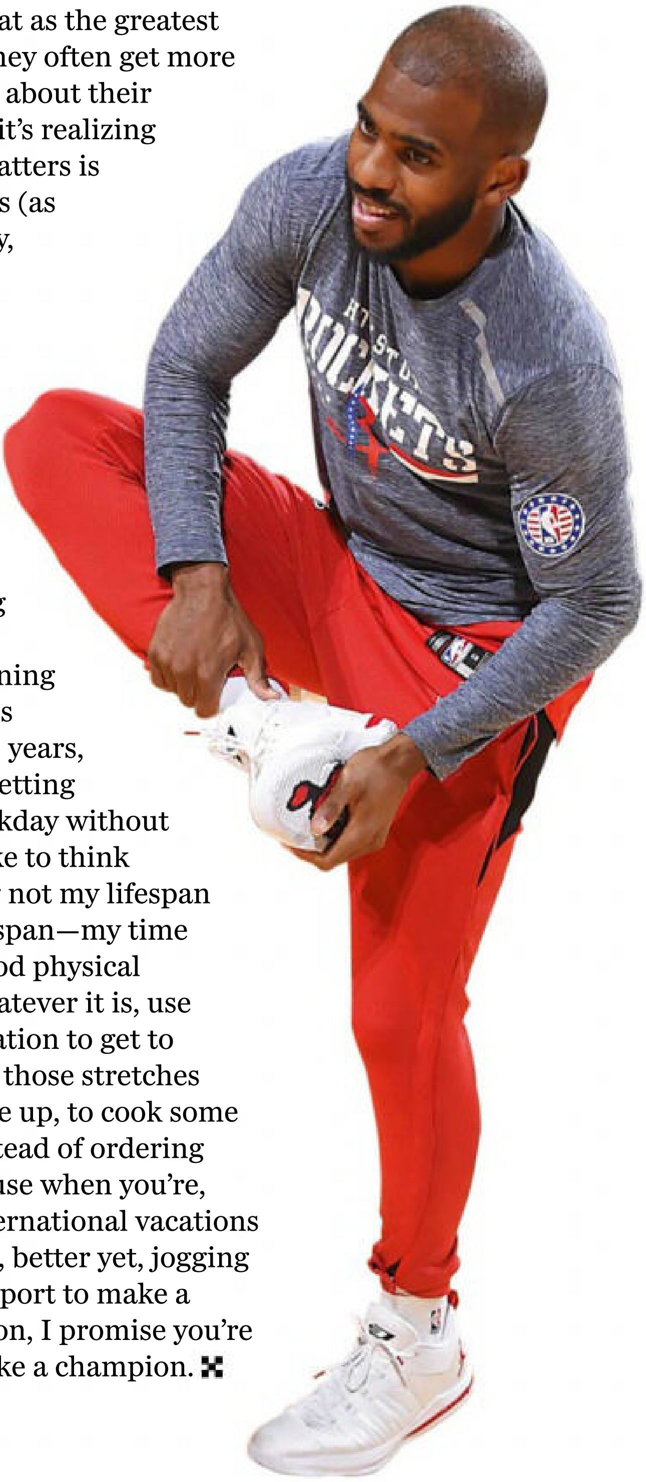
For LeBron, 37 years old and 19 seasons into his career, staying healthy means not overdoing it during the regular season. Which is why he sometimes takes games off to rest. Superstars have learned that they need to manage the toll they are putting on their bodies in the months leading up to the most important games. That doesn't just mean playing fewer minutes but sometimes sitting out games or not travelling with the team at all. It's a league-wide trend that you may have heard referred to as "load management".

We can apply this mindset to our lives: It's okay to take breaks. People are running out of gas from having to always be on—look no further than the record rate at which people have quit their jobs over the past two years. I'm not saying we should never be stressed. In fact, elite athletes are experts at using stress to their advantage—because they know it's stress *plus recovery* that creates growth. So put in some big weeks and close that deal—but then tell your boss that if LeBron takes breaks, so can you.



SHARPEN YOUR GOALS

I've noticed that as the greatest athletes age, they often get more single-minded about their goals. Usually it's realizing that all that matters is championships (as opposed to, say, watching a highlight blow up on Instagram, or dropping 50 in Charlotte on a Tuesday night). What's that goal going to be for you? Maybe it's running half-marathons for the next 20 years, or maybe it's getting through a workday without back pain. I like to think of lengthening not my lifespan but my healthspan—my time on earth in good physical condition. Whatever it is, use that for motivation to get to the gym, to do those stretches when you wake up, to cook some vegetables instead of ordering delivery. Because when you're, say, taking international vacations in your 80s, or, better yet, jogging through an airport to make a tight connection, I promise you're going to feel like a champion. ⌘



PHIL MICKELSON: BRIAN ROTHMULLER/ICON SPORTSWIRE. SERENA WILLIAMS: ADAM PRETTY. CHRIS PAUL: BILL BAPTIST/NBAE. TOM BRADY: JIM ROGASH. TIGER WOODS: WARREN LITTLE. CRISTIANO RONALDO: CLIVE ROSE. ALL: GETTY IMAGES.

GQ World
The Outlier

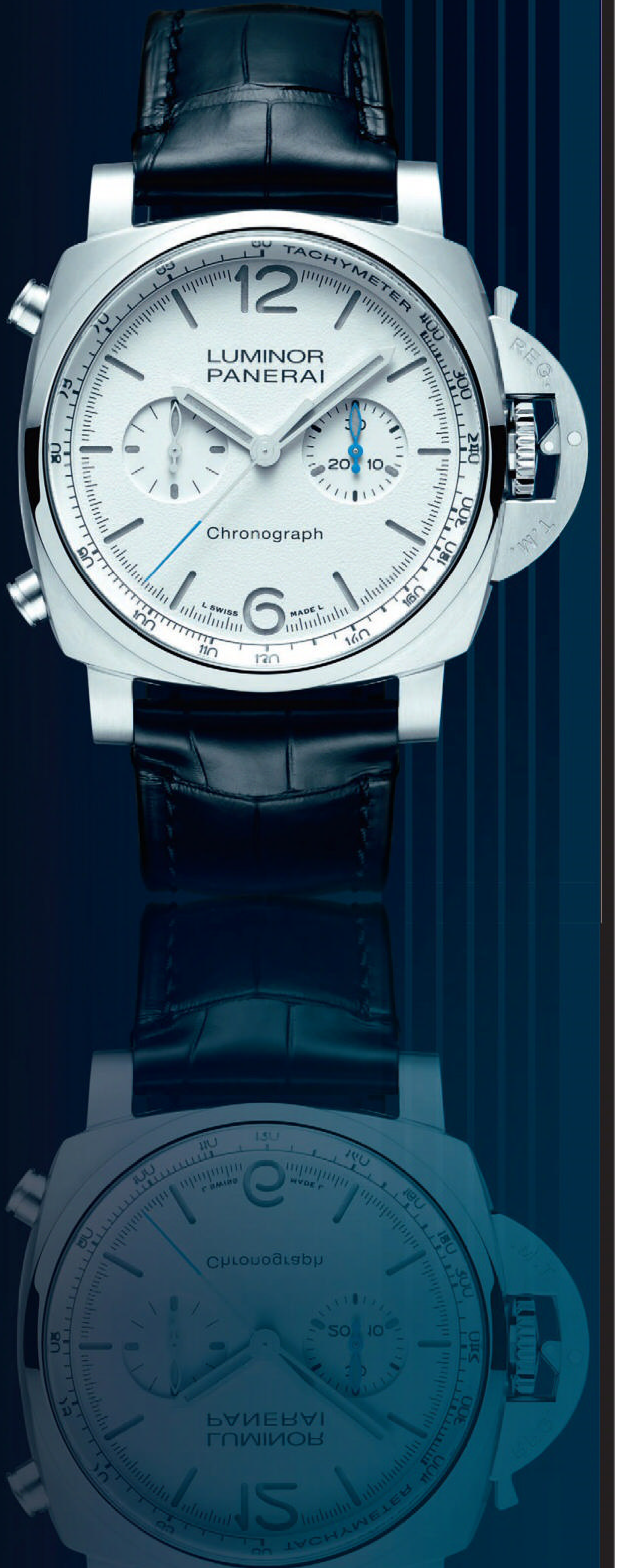
Above the Fray

Panerai is not the first brand that comes to mind when you think of chronographs. The new Luminor Chrono collection is here to change that. By PARTH CHARAN

For a brand synonymous with high-end, water-resistant tool watches, Panerai actually has plenty of experience with chronographs. Back in the early 2000s, as the brand made headway into manufacturing movements in-house, the P.2004 movement served to demonstrate their chronograph-building chops. Its eight-day power reserve, single push-piece functionality, and chamfered edges made it a fairly impressive entry into the chronograph game.

Now, we have a new set of chronographs, forged in stainless steel and featuring an all-new, in-house P.9200 calibre with a power reserve of 42 hours. While *Paneristi* would argue that the singularity of purpose is what sets a brand like Panerai apart, watchmaking trends point at greater diversification being the new norm. Panerai has also judiciously retained Luminor's signature sandwich dial with the chronograph pushers placed on the opposite side of its patented crown-protecting bridge. Although the watch stops resisting water after 50 metres, so the crown's presence does seem ornamental. What is indeed a refreshing addition to the tried-and-tested visual cocktail is the tachymeter scale encircling the dial.

Available with blue, white, or black dials, the watch has a typically understated appearance despite its 44-mm case. Of the lot, it's the pristine, matt-white version that really stands out and is the most fresh-faced watch from the collection. It goes best with a black alligator strap but a quick-release function ensures that you can just as easily equip the watch with a metal bracelet. Not all chronograph enthusiasts will be on board with the Luminor Chrono's size, given that market trends are leaning towards more compact cases. For hardcore Paneristi, however, this is a must have. ■



LUMINOR CHRONO PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF PANERAI.

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HETAIN PATEL
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On The Rise

After two decades of lightly skewering xenophobia and framing his diasporic experience in humorous videos, British-Gujarati artist Hetain Patel's work has acquired an undertone of anger—slinging him into the most potent phase of his career yet. By VIVEK MENEZES

GIVEN OUR SURREAL, roller-coaster pandemic times, it has become even more difficult to tease out historically significant new trends in the international art world.

This is because only a few certainties remain: consumption and connoisseurship continue to migrate to digital screens, moving images reign paramount, production values matter more than ever, and—crucially—political awareness must be uncompromisingly fine-tuned to global preoccupations.

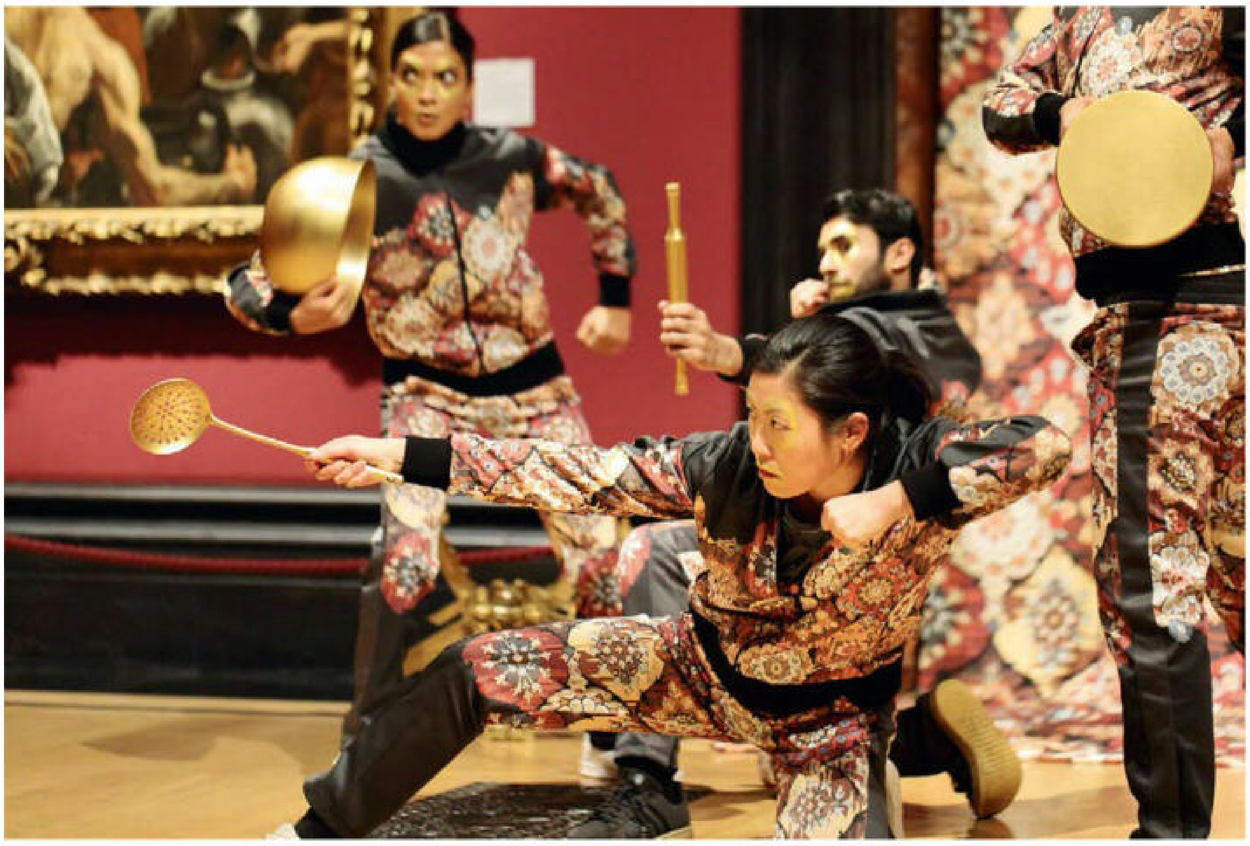
In this novel paradigm, bristling with complex challenges and the ever-present opportunity to "go viral" to billions of eyeballs at once, 41-year-old Hetain Patel has unexpectedly catapulted himself into the handful of the most compelling artists in the world.

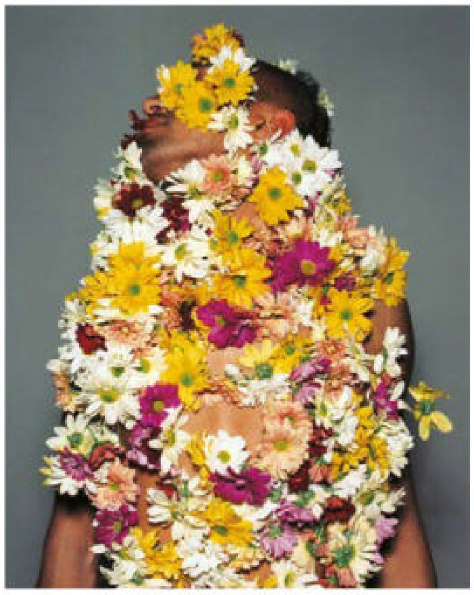
The British-Gujarati artist's videos—which date back to 2007 on his YouTube channel—were always supremely clever, sly, and hilarious in the grand British tradition of wonderfully educated performers, like Monty Python, who utilize the potential of subversive slapstick.

His earliest videos ridiculed xenophobia with understated humour, but more recently Patel has begun to mine another register altogether. Drawing from deep residual anger about contemporary racism and colonial history, Patel's newest works are powerfully raw. They situate him more in the vein of Hanif Kureishi, the brilliant British novelist and filmmaker who straddled similar multiple worlds in the 1980s.

As big as that moment was—with Kureishi's superb debut novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* made into a television series with a David Bowie soundtrack, and his screenplay for the wonderful *My Beautiful Laundrette* nominated for an Academy Award—the future is shaping up even better for Patel.

His first two major works after lockdown—the 30-minute performance *Baa's Gold 10* was filmed at the storied National Gallery, London, earlier this year, and the 29-minute cinematic production *Trinity* just had its India debut at Chatterjee & Lal in





This page, clockwise from left: Trinity (2021); *Baa's Gold 10* (2021) at the National Gallery, London; *Gajra* (2004).

Opposite page, from top: Hetain Patel at Piccadilly Circus, London, the site of his trompe l'oeil work *Baa's House 11* (2021); *Baa's House 1* (2015).

HETAIN PATEL PORTRAIT: COURTESY OF PICCADILLY LIGHTS AND CIRCA. EXHIBITION PHOTOGRAPHS: HETAIN PATEL AND CHATTERJEE & LAL.

mid-January—are both profoundly compelling. All of a sudden, this artist is no longer holding anything back, having dropped the stiff upper lip that his contemporaries are too afraid to do without. The results are jaw-droppingly potent. Now everyone is paying attention.

"THE BIG TURNING POINT for me was the global Black Lives Matter movement," says Patel on a video call from his London studio. "It's unexpected what something like that does to you. For people like me, who have made so much of our lives about anti-racism, to see so much performative nonsense was really traumatizing. Lots of stuff from my childhood came flooding back like a tidal wave—things I had forgotten, things that I persuaded myself never happened."

The imposed isolations of those explosive days came as a boon to Patel, who commenced experimenting within the same forms he explored previously. "It made me nervous," the artist says. "But then I reconciled to the fact that it was a natural expansion, and came to terms with the fact that anger can live in the same space as humour, joy, and love in what is sometimes a contradictory ecology of tones. That understanding was really freeing."

In important ways, *Baa's Gold 10* can be considered the apex achievement of Patel's practice to this point. Originally commissioned for "Dance to the Music of Our Time"—the National Gallery's "live exhibition" celebrating the 17th-century French baroque master Nicolas Poussin—Patel's performance piece became a vehicle for convergent ideas and impulses: an explorative redemption of the artist's late grandmother's horrifyingly traumatic experience of a robbery, the physical juxtaposition of immigrant stories and minority bodies in one of the most hallowed shrines of British high culture, and playing out how working-class swagger easily outclasses elitist hauteur.

That last theme is essential to understanding Patel, whose biggest influence is his father's career as an expert craftsman who transforms normal cars into hearses. "The diasporic way makes it difficult to meaningfully connect to your roots," he told me. "The way I do it is to relate directly to the working-class community I was surrounded with while growing up, where most people worked with their hands. It's a very strong part of my heritage.

"The great thing that's happened with showing my work in India (his previous Chatterjee & Lal shows were in 2012, 2015, and 2018) has been a really joyful connection with my peers. It feels really beautiful to be a part of a greater community of artists who are internationally linked. The way each of us locates ourselves is really interesting."

If you understand that context, it's genuinely inspirational to see where *Trinity* aims, along with the future heights that Patel is preparing himself to surmount. An irresistibly gripping, allegorical short film that feels like a British-desi version of *Black Panther* in the works, there can be no doubt it will be an international sensation if expanded to feature length. Don't bet against Hetain Patel to get it done. ✖

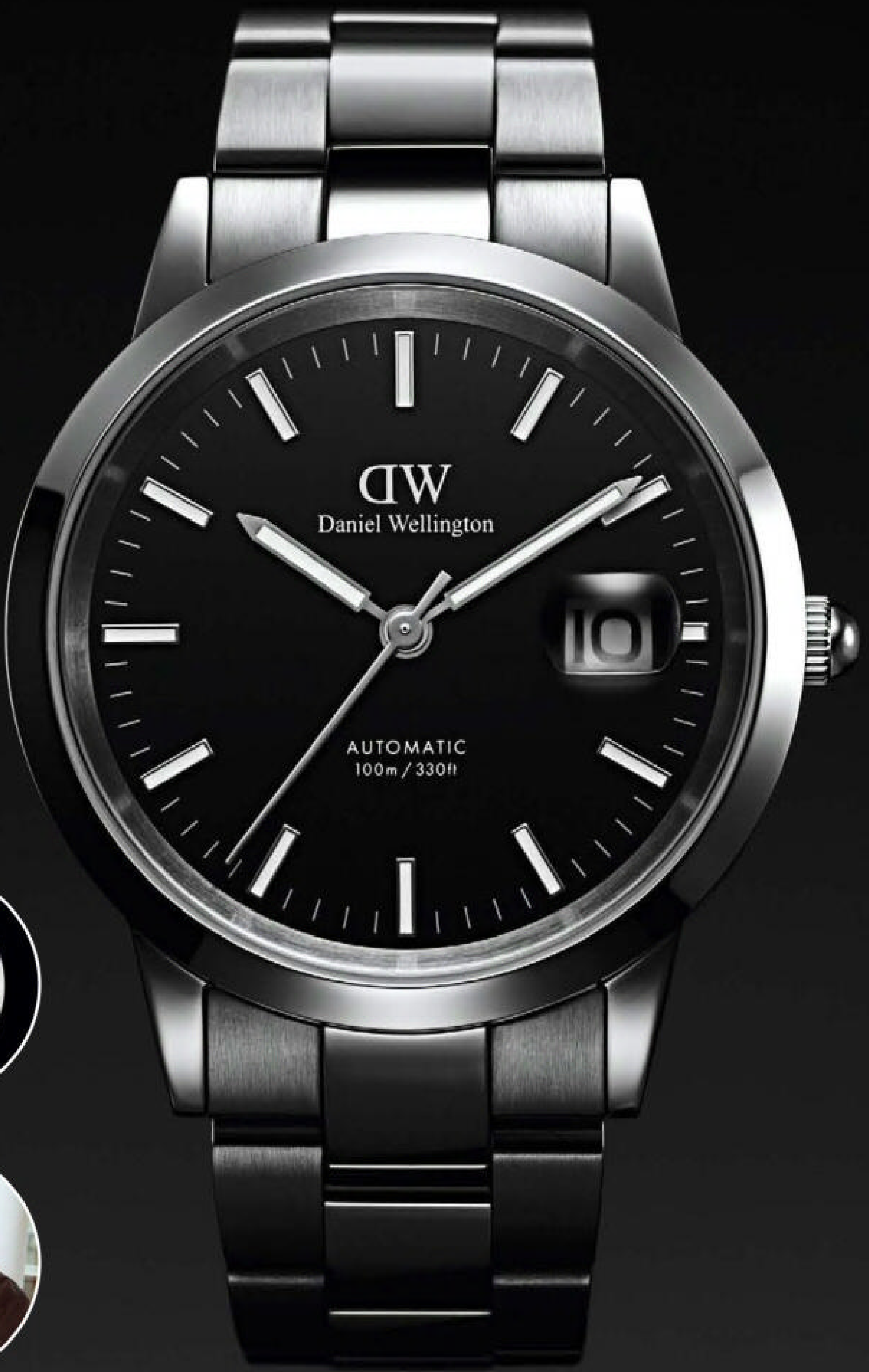
GQ World

Automatic Ally

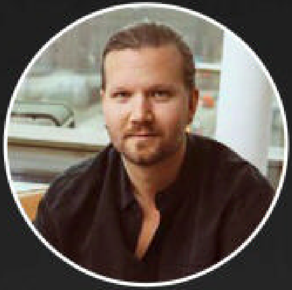
Smooth Operator

Daniel Wellington's moment in the sun has officially arrived with its first automatic timepiece.

By PARTH CHARAN



Stepping into the realm of mechanical movements may be a small step for watch-kind. For Daniel Wellington, however, it's a mark of evolution. As the Swedish watch brand turns 10, Olof Nordström, its head of design, throws some light on just what sets its aesthetic apart and what the future holds.



Top: The DW Iconic Link features a transparent caseback. *Above:* Olof Nordström, the design head at Daniel Wellington.

Did accommodating an automatic movement present any challenges in preserving the look of the Iconic Link watch?
The case of the original Iconic Link is 8.5-mm thick while the Automatic has a thickness of 11.5 mm, which was necessary to fit the automatic movement. The thicker case amplifies the already bold appearance of the Iconic Link, while also aligning itself with the idea of traditional horology.

How would you describe the Daniel Wellington aesthetic?
Simple and minimalistic at first glance but complex and refined when you look at the details. This attention to detail, through design and manufacturing, is something we've never compromised on, and I believe this sets the tone for the overall aesthetic.

How do you see the Iconic Link design evolving in the future?
Our step into the world of mechanical watches was a great one, not just for the Iconic Link as a collection but also for Daniel Wellington as a brand. Without disclosing too much about the future direction, we will certainly continue to challenge ourselves with new ideas.

How has the overall functionality of the watch improved with the new features?
This is our most advanced timepiece to date. It has evolved from the original Iconic Link both technically and aesthetically and has been endowed with several new features that give it different characteristics and functionalities. The Iconic Link Automatic was conceived to fit in with every moment of life.

Do you foresee more complications being included in DW's future line-up?
Being a brand that historically has had relatively few complications overall, combined with our minimalist approach to the aesthetic, I don't see that as key going forward. However, as mentioned, we're not closing any doors to trying new things and we're going to continue to stay curious. Where that will lead us only the future can tell. ✖

DANIEL WELLINGTON ICONIC LINK WATCH AND OLOF NORDSTRÖM PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF BRAND.

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GQ World
Music

Poetic Licence

After two decades of composing and performing her specific brand of *multiversal* music, Lahore-origin, Brooklyn-based, Grammy-nominated artist Arooj Aftab is at last in heavy rotation.

By NIDHI GUPTA

AROOJ AFTAB: AMANDA HATFIELD. BIRD UNDER WATER: ART BY ANUM AWAN AND YIKUN LIANG. SIREN ISLANDS: "MISS ROCKAWAY" ARTWORK COURTESY OF SWOON STUDIO.

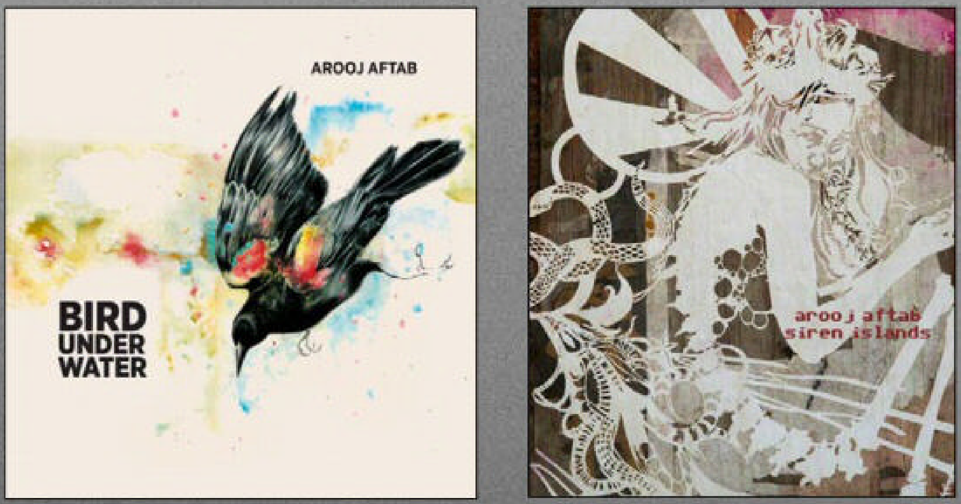
AROOJ AFTAB IS not a fashion person, but she definitely has a stage look: dark colours, sherwani jacket, statement shoes. "It's been working well for me so far, but I guess it's in need of an upgrade," she says. "It can be difficult, you know. When you ask designers to make something androgynous for you to wear on stage, they run away screaming. Like, what did I say?

"I can't go on stage in a lehnga or a sari," she continues, one eye on her cat, which I can't see because Aftab's Zoom window has a virtual filter blacking out her background. This December evening, she sits in a dimly lit room in Brooklyn, wearing a black sweatshirt, accessorized minimally with thick black-frame glasses and a silver link chain necklace. This combination of aesthetic choices has the unintended effect of making it seem like her face is floating in a void, her voice emanating from some other dimension. "Roopa Mahadevan can wear a sari because she's a badass Carnatic vocalist. I'm not a desi artist. I'm a New York diaspora artist.

"But then, working with designers and stylists is the inevitable path for someone who's blowing up, right?" Aftab says wryly. It's been a few weeks since the 36-year-old artist learned that she'd scored two Grammy nominations, in the best global performance (for the utterly visceral, evocative track "Mohabbat" from her third album *Vulture Prince*) and best new artist categories.

Aftab was in Karachi to record her first-ever Coke Studio session on the day she got the "tune in" email from the Recording Academy. She felt sick. "I told my manager on the ground that we need to clear our calendars for that evening. Something might happen, nothing might happen—either way, I was going to need a stiff whisky."

The best new artist nom took everyone by surprise. It's a significantly more mainstream category, usually dominated by the world's biggest rising pop stars. And yet, here was Aftab—a Berklee-grad vocalist and composer with roots in Lahore; whose post-genre music is inspired by centuries of poets before her; channelling a wide variety of influences, including jazz, ambient, and Sufi music—now in the same league as "multimillion-dollar artists" like Olivia Rodrigo and Finneas. This has never happened before at the Grammys for a musician of South Asian descent.



The cover art for Arooj Aftab's first two albums.

"The Academy has listened to some very hard feedback over the past five years, especially from musicians in the jazz, folk, indie, American music scenes—that there are people making good music and who are actually quite popular, but can't really compete with these multimillion-dollar artists in the top four positions."

Aftab is no stranger to accolades, but the Grammy nominations have had a huge impact. Her social media following has spiked. She's done her first NPR Tiny Desk (Home) Concert. She's signed to Verve, the legendary label that once repped Nina Simone and now features bright young jazz-oriented artists like Jacob Collier.

And while she's still on edge, Aftab has now moved on to thinking about the shows, the campaign, the all-consuming stress of what she'll wear—but also about composing new music, "investigating" new instruments to bring into her crazy world. Getting on with it.

"Actually, it's not even a competition," Aftab adds as an afterthought. "It's just about different kinds of tracks that deserve recognition equally."

THERE EXIST OVER 300 covers of Leonard Cohen's 1984 track "Hallelujah". Chances are you probably first heard the Rufus Wainwright version in *Shrek,* back in 2001. Arooj Aftab discovered this mystical canticle some years earlier, by way of the late singer-songwriter Jeff Buckley's 1994 rendition.

Aftab's own cover—on which her voice shimmers over some simple but accomplished acoustic guitar work—was recorded in 1999, as she transitioned from being an avid listener to starting to play. This was before YouTube, "a time when we didn't really know how to use the internet", she says. "And in not knowing even just the power of the internet, really, I sent [the 'Hallelujah' cover] to friends, and they sent it to friends and it became like a viral chain."

Aftab grew up in '90s Lahore, in an environment steeped in music, art, and poetry. "Pre–9/11 Lahore was such a romantic old city, studded with red brick *imaratein,* where people just loved music and culture and there were evenings of *shayari,*" Aftab trails off wistfully. "It really evoked so much potential for dreaming and ideas and for getting lost in them."

Her parents and their inner circle, "the true '70s progressive kind", held regular listening parties, where they seriously debated, critiqued, and unearthed rare recordings and shared bootleg cassettes of everyone from Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan to Abida Parveen to Noor Jahan.

At the same time, a teenage Aftab was hungrily consuming all the music she could access: the Spice Girls, Hariharan, Usha Uthup, Mariah Carey. Her high-school band, The Drumsticks, once opened for Strings, Pakistan's biggest rock duo at the time. "All the other guys in my band are doctors today," she says, "but I knew then, standing on that stage, that this was going to be it for me."

In 2005 (and a post–9/11 universe) Aftab arrived in Boston—the first brown person at Berklee, by her own estimation. "It was like all the chief music nerds from every high school in the world had been assembled," she laughs. Music, specifically jazz, became life uninterrupted,

▶

GQ World
Music

consuming her from class to the seedy dive clubs she hung out at in the evenings.

By the end of the decade, Aftab moved to New York, which she calls a utopia of sorts. She quickly built her own ensemble, and began to perform. Today, she cringes at the thought of those early songs, like “Bolo Na”, but does admit her work got the city's art circles to sit up and take notice almost instantly.

Rapper Himanshu Suri a.k.a. Heems tells me that he first saw Arooj Aftab perform in Bed-Stuy with mutual friends in New York about six years ago. Soon enough he'd roped her in to perform alongside jazz superstar Vijay Iyer.

“There's a way Urdu and Punjabi poetry can tug at my heartstrings,” says Heems, “activating some dormant sense of pain or longing in my DNA. Arooj's voice channels that for me. I remember playing her music for my father years ago, a fan of poetry himself. It bridged our worlds of musical interests, falling somewhere in the middle.”

“Arooj and I make music together often,” says Vijay Iyer. “Whenever we do, very little needs to be said in advance. She has this incredible musical intuition that makes everything feel right. It's like the music is being channelled from somewhere else.”

Together, they have an album ready for release this year. Aftab's Grammy noms remind Iyer of Esperanza Spalding's shock win (over Justin Bieber) in the same category in 2011. “Her win was well deserved, an incursion into the mainstream from what might have been viewed as the musical margins. I think Arooj's nomination is a tribute to her vision and determination, her refusal to be pigeonholed as an ‘ethnic’ artist, and also the shifting identities and aesthetics of America's younger generations in particular.”

“NEW YORKERS KNOW STUFF,” Aftab says, when I ask if her American audience quite understood what she was doing. “It's rarely ever that they're seeing something for the first time and are baffled by it. They have a sense of intrigue; they know how to absorb new things, and recognize what's good.”

Still, Aftab is a little bemused by the near-universal and endless euphoria around *Vulture Prince* since it was released in April last year. “It's hard to say what exactly did it for so many people at such a scale, for this self-funded, indie-label album to be on all these best-of lists, and for ‘Mohabbat’ to be among six top songs for *Time* magazine in the summer, where the other artists are, like, Lil Nas X, and Cardi B!”

Aftab and band toured with *Vulture Prince,* playing in a few American and European cities when the pandemic eased up a bit last year. They were surprised to see cheers go up from the crowd the moment Maeve Gilchrist plucked the first notes on her harp for any song. “They knew our music intimately before they came to our shows!” Aftab laughs. “We felt like rock stars—and that was not normal for a jazz band.”

The harp, accompanied by other nylon string instruments, is the warm, glowing nucleus of these ghazal-inspired songs. “It's like a guitar but also something of a deconstructed piano and I love that about it,” says Aftab. “But there's people who play the harp and they're so annoying, like, it's so ‘beautiful’ and ‘angelic’,” she rolls her eyes. “In my crazy mind, it has so much potential.”

Vulture Prince is made up of seven songs bleeding with pain, loss, and the unbearable poignancy of these things in equal measure. “It's about the disappointment that you feel from how the world is, you know? Like in ‘Inayaat’, that line ‘*kuch toh duniya ki Inayaat ne dil tod diya*’, that was kind of my anchor. There's beauty and there's breakage and the world is relentless.

“It explores these dark but sweet themes”—of romance, the night, the moon, the lover, who they are to you. It is, without a doubt, coloured by the grief of losing her brother and a close friend back home. “It's also about the grind,” she says, refusing to dwell on that difficult time. “Us as a young generation not being able to do our day jobs and save and buy property: Like, what the fuck do we do?”

When she began working on *Vulture Prince,* Aftab wanted to “escape” the neo-Sufi tag that stuck with her first two albums, *Bird Under Water* (2014) and *Siren Islands* (2018)—to be recognized as a more mainstream artist with a more competitive record. “I wanted to lean a little bit towards pop, which is horrifying to say now,” she laughs. “I wanted people to hear that it's also American folk and minimal and jazz and semi-classical. Like, do not play this in your yoga studio!”

The word *cover* bothers her. “These songs are not re-interpretations of old ghazals, but new compositions of old poetry.

“When there's a jazz standard that Ella [Fitzgerald] sang, that Billie [Holiday] sang, that Alicia Keys sings, no one is calling these covers of each other. When Mehdi Hassan sang a Farida Khanum number, he was not ‘covering’ it. It was his own. I feel like we need to start giving artistic credit where it is due.”

Aftab's “Suroor” is doused with a heady cocktail of string arrangements that a less avant-garde producer may not think to put together—and the few lines she extracts from the original qawwali by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan are more a jumping off point to dive into something wholly new.

“I've spent a lot of time trying to create music that is about my personal experience as an artist over the last two decades,” Aftab says. “Coming from a South Asian background, having a love for semi-classical vocal styles and melodies that we grew up with as if they were furniture. Having studied jazz so hardcore. Having been around musicians of the world. Having lived in New York. Having a very experimental, explorative nature. Loving American minimalist composers like John Cage. Listening to so much stuff, and drawing from so many different places and having it translate....

“When *Vulture Prince* was done, even before it was out, I was really proud of it,” she says, a shadow of a quiver in her voice. “This thing that I've wanted to do has just started to happen here.”

PHOTOGRAPH: TONJE THILESEN.

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GQ World
Watches

Introducing our new watch columnist, **Nick Foulkes**

How Do You Make an Iconic Watch? Put It on an Iconic Athlete

Without Jean-Claude Killy, the Rolex Dato-Compax would just be reference 6236, says *GQ* watch columnist Nick Foulkes.

I REALIZED THAT horological nomenclature was getting out of hand when I was told that the primrose-dial Rolex Oyster Perpetual had a nickname. One of the hot quintet of candy-coloured-dial watches the Crown issued in 2020, it's got a playful personality. Yet I was unable to keep a straight face when a collector friend told me that the yellow watch is called the Pikachu.

Rolex is particularly rich in informal shorthand, bestowed by fans and collectors. There's an entire extended universe of cartoon characters in the brand's ranks: Smurf, Kermit, Hulk, Batman, and Batgirl. There are soft drinks: Coke, Pepsi, and root beer. Even cigarettes: The John Player Special refers to a black-and-gold Daytona. And, most famously, there are the film stars like Paul Newman, Steve McQueen, and Marlon Brando, whose names have come to be associated with Rolex models that now fetch astronomical prices at auction.

But for a brand predominantly associated with sports watches, there is just one sporting name linked with a particular Rolex: the Killy, which refers to the Rolex Dato-Compax chronograph worn by French Alpine ski champion Jean-Claude Killy. (The skier himself preferred a reference *6236*, but the name has stuck to the whole family of Dato-Compax timepieces.) The Killy, especially the *6236*, is a great watch: Its 36-mm case houses an anti-magnetic 12-hour chronograph and a triple calendar, and as a congenital contrarian I would argue that it is far more chic than the Paul Newman chronograph. Nevertheless, the Paul Newman is much more famous (and expensive).

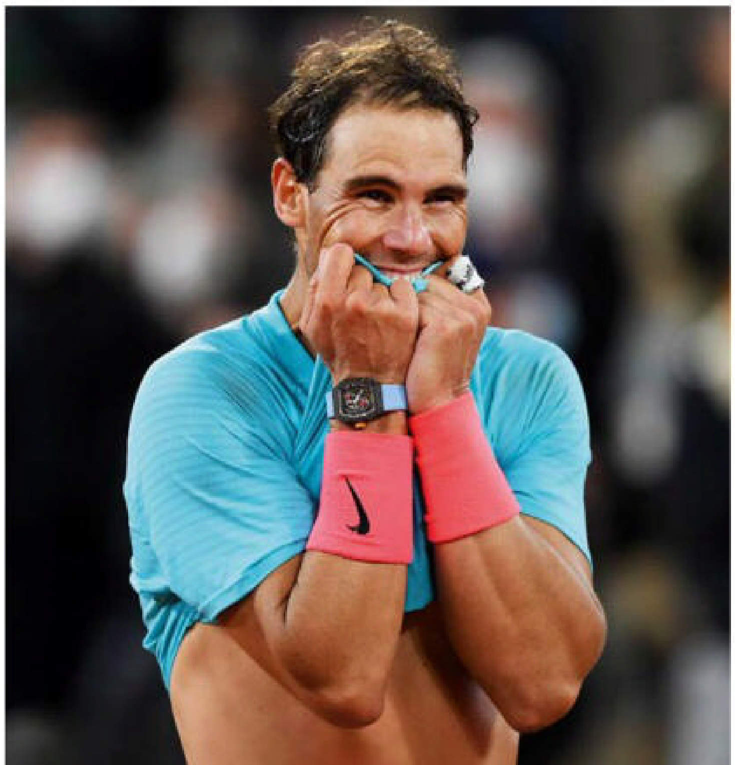
Sports personalities are among the most frequently employed brand ambassadors, so why are their names not more widely bandied about in auction catalogues and the like? There is no single model known to collectors as the Federer, the Sir Jackie Stewart, or the Beckham, despite their penchant for certain Rolex, and, in the case of Beckham, Tudor, watches. Paradoxically, the answer might well be that sports are such an expected part of horological marketing these days. Killy was a Rolex ambassador well before the age of Instagram ad campaigns, after all.

Today, for a sports personality to become firmly rooted in horological culture, it takes not just athletic excellence and longevity but actual close involvement with the brand. Richard Mille scored a bull's-eye with Rafael Nadal by developing a tourbillon weighing 30 grams that the champion can wear on court during Grand Slams. Given that Mille watches are not named but known by serial numbers (this is the RM 027-04), it is much easier to remember it by Nadal's name. And it has certainly stuck: There is also a piece called the Baby Nadal, which is, ironically, somewhat larger than its parent model.

Timepieces made by Richard Mille are perfect for the modern sports star: readily identifiable, hard to come by, expensive, and exuberantly contemporary in styling. Audemars Piguet's pumped-up Royal Oak Offshore model enjoys similar standing among elite athletes. The names Shaquille O'Neal, LeBron James, Rubens Barrichello, and Juan Pablo Montoya have been given to specific Offshores, anchoring them firmly in collectors' minds and setting them aside from the tsunami of limited, numbered, and otherwise special editions that the Le Brassus brand puts out each year.

But my favourite watch of all these is not actually named after an athlete at all but after his widow. Finnish-born model Nina Rindt was married to Formula 1 racing champion Jochen Rindt, who tragically died at Monza in 1970. Rindt, arguably the most glamorous woman in the Grand Prix pit lane at the time, was often photographed wearing a Panda-Dial Universal Genève Compax that her husband had given her. It's not as catchy as Pikachu, but the Nina Rindt moniker stuck, and today you can thank her for raising the value of these handsome Universals to the level of trophy chronos made by the likes of Rolex and Omega. So to all the glamorous F1, NBA, and football stars—and their wives—that are reading this: Get yourself a sporty timepiece and wear it until your name sticks. Maybe that way the next watch we lust after won't be called the Diet Dr. Pepper—or the Papa Smurf. ■

From top:
Paul Newman, Nina Rindt, and Rafael Nadal wearing their signature watches.



RAFAEL NADAL: SHAUN BOTTERILL. PAUL NEWMAN: RON GALELLA/RON GALELLA COLLECTION. NINA RINDT: LEONARD BURT/CENTRAL PRESS. ALL: GETTY IMAGES.

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Eat Like An Athlete

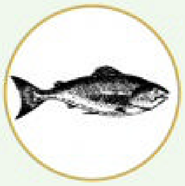
There's always a control room behind the beast physiques of world-class athletes, and the shot caller is their nutritionist. With a client list of star sportsmen (and women) like Virat Kohli, Saina Nehwal, Shikhar Dhawan, and Olympic medallist Sushil Kumar, celebrity nutritionist Ryan Fernando has all the tips you need to get your body in fighting form. Treat these rules like gospel, and you'll be well on your way to pro status in no time.

By SAUMYAA VOHRA

How many meals should an athlete eat in a day?

Depending on how many times they're training in a day, anywhere between six and nine. This includes mini meals like protein shakes, or mid-training snacks like nuts or bananas, apart from a well-proportioned breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

5 Foods to Start Eating Right Now



Fatty fish, or chia and flax seeds, and walnuts: They're full of omega-3, which battles post-exercise inflammation.

Beetroots: Their high nitrate content and betanin are great for the liver (which works overtime during training), improve endurance, and reduce exhaustion.

Meat and eggs, or paneer and pulses: All high-protein foods that build muscle—and muscle is an athlete's bread and butter.

Dairy, or if you're allergic, nut, oat, or soy milk: Full of electrolytes and calcium, they rehydrate as well as support recovery.

Sweet potatoes, rice, millet, bajra, or ragi: These contain complex carbohydrates, which are the greatest source of energy.

3 Common Nutrition Mistakes People Make

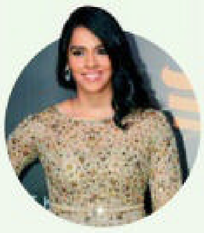
Eating without a plan: People put great focus on the equipment they use and their training, but eat restaurant food with total abandon. Food from outside lowers an athlete's ability because it isn't cooked thoughtfully. It's the equivalent of putting bad-quality fuel in an engine.

Training on an empty stomach: When you do, you tend to lose equal amounts of fat and muscle. Ideally, an athlete should eat a small meal at least half an hour or 45 minutes before training—a glass of milk or dry fruits, or vegetable juice if weight loss is your goal.

Thinking eating less means losing weight: Starving the body actually releases more stress hormones (like cortisol), which means that your body will store everything as fat in the next simple meal you have. For trained athletes, there can also be muscle wastage, where your muscles experience catabolism and break down.

RYAN FERNANDO: COURTESY OF HIS WEBSITE. HARBHAJAN SINGH, SAINA NEHWAL, ANUSHKA SHARMA, YUVRAJ SINGH, AND VIRAT KOHLI: FOTOCORP. ILLUSTRATIONS: SHUTTERSTOCK.

Harbhajan Singh


Saina Nehwal

Anushka Sharma

Yuvraj Singh

Virat Kohli

Fernando's Clients Include...

3 Lifestyle Changes All Athletes Should Make

Do a blood test: It's important for you to know your lipid, vitamin, and cholesterol profiles, and your liver and kidney functions to assess exactly what you need, in terms of your diet.

Understand your athletic load: How many hours you're training for, what that training consists of, your heart rate—they all help reveal your total calorie expenditure. Most athletes do not know their energy expenditure, and so their food either doesn't keep pace with—or is in excess of—what their body needs.

Renounce restaurant food: You'll often find cheap, low-quality ingredients and vanaspati ghee in restaurant food, which causes inflammation in the body. Most chefs don't prepare meals with care, which is why I recommend all athletes eat home-made food.

2 Things an Athlete Does Differently From a Non-athlete

They sleep 10 hours a day: Some athletes believe they can get away with sleeping for six to seven hours a day, but to recover from the previous day's training and to lower your heart rate, 10 hours of sleep is ideal.

They eat to win: They are often training up to eight hours a day, for which they need to meet calorie goals by eating more. The idea is to gain muscle and lose fat, and the calorie intake must account for that.

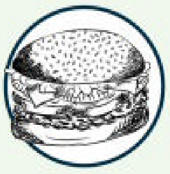
3 Things That Should Accompany a Good Diet

Knowing your protein intake: Most people do not need more than one gram per kilogram of body weight. The Indian diet is a bit low on it, but choose to get your protein from your natural diet before looking to supplements.

Drink just enough water: Forty ml per kg body weight is the standard reference. A 50 kg athlete would require a litre a day, and so forth. Athletes lose more liquid though, and it should be replenished—up to 1.5 times the amount lost.

Get a genetic test: It helps determine what nutrients your body is lacking, or forecast deficiencies so that you can make up for them in a targeted manner.

2 Foods to Cut Down



1 **Junk food:** A cheat meal in the week is okay from a psychological satisfaction point of view, but it doesn't serve any other purpose.

2 **Alcohol:** Workouts release creatine kinase, an enzyme that helps recovery and muscle-protein synthesis. It circulates in your blood for 24 hours—and alcohol destroys it.

Are supplements necessary?
They are a nutritional convenience—only to be taken if you can't get your nutrients from your diet. For an athlete, they are split into two: immunity building (like vitamins C and D) and performance building (like glutamine). Sports drinks also help because they replenish electrolytes, which any athlete loses when they sweat.

GQ WHISKY SPECIAL

Pour Us Another

Star single malts, fresh-off-the-press homegrowns, or brave new blends—we've distilled the best of 2021 down to help you find your perfect dram. By SAUMYAA VOHRA

GQ ICONIC BLEND

ROYAL SALUTE
BLENDED SCOTCH WHISKY
21
THE SIGNATURE BLEND

Royal Salute 21: The Signature Blend

Though the iconic blend has launched two truly poignant edits in the last couple of years—the Malts Blend and the Lost Blend—it's the O.G. that's on our list this year because a classic never loses badge value. Its sweet pear, citrus, and autumn flower notes are best evoked with a dash of water.
₹13,900 (approx.)

OAKSMITH
GOLD

Oaksmith Gold

It's the best of all worlds with this blend, which swirls three whisky cultures into one bottle: highland Scotch and Kentucky straight bourbon with the Japanese craftsmanship of Shinji Fukuyo. To add to that, the smoky-sweet flavours of the full-bodied firewater were crafted specifically for the Indian palate, so feel free to pair this with all the tandoori chicken you like.
₹1,375 (approx.)

GLENMORANGIE

X by Glenmorangie

Unlike its snootier single malt counterparts, this new rendition by Glenmorangie has no objection to being paired with a mixer of your choice—just make sure it ties in with its orange sherbet and honeysuckle notes. And that it leaves room for that smooth, sweet crème brûlée–esque finish, of course.
₹5,900 (approx.)

THE SINGLETON
18 YEARS OLD

The Singleton of Glendullan 18

This old-enough-to-vote single malt is as sublime and smooth a Scotch as they come. Its stewed fruit and berry notes are best enjoyed as a winter dram, and preferably accompanied by a few fresh skewers and some fantastic company.
₹19,200 (approx.)

JAMESON
BLACK
BARREL

Jameson Black Barrel

Triple distilled, twice charred, and the one stop for your sweet-toasty Irish whiskey needs, this Jameson edit has only just made it to Indian shores this year. No more duty-free stops to pick up the bottled nuances of vanilla, toasted wood, butterscotch, and spice; you can pop those bottles with gay abandon.
₹5,600 (approx.)

ROYAL SALUTE: COURTESY OF PERNOD RICARD INDIA. OAKSMITH GOLD: COURTESY OF BEAM SUNTORY. SINGLETON: COURTESY OF DIAGEO INDIA. GLENMORANGIE AND JAMESON: COURTESY OF BRANDS.

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SUNTORY
WHISKY
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FROM THE HOUSE OF
SUNTORY WHISKY
ESTABLISHED 1923
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JAPANESE WHISKY
70 cl alc. 43% vol.

Suntory Whisky Toki

The house's chief blender, Shinji Fukuyo is known to spin liquid gold out of his blends, and this path-breaking whisky is no exception. A game-changing mix of Hakushu American White Oak Cask malt whisky with Chita heavy-type grain whisky, this blend (also laced with choice Yamazaki malts) is silky and distinctive.
₹3,960 (approx.)

Copper Dog

Having emerged at the very start of the year, this eight-Speyside blend has garnered a fast following in its 12-month run. We suspect both its stone-fruit palate (led into beautifully by orange peel and spices) and its easy-cool bottle are to credit for its popularity.
₹3,000 (approx.)

The
MACALLAN
Nº6

The Macallan No. 6

We're told through childhood not to judge a book by its cover, but the custom crystal decanter by Lalique that holds this rare whisky is a harbinger of the luxury to come. The layered Christmas-cake nuances of this whisky (owed to the first-fill, sherry-seasoned oak casks from Spain) make it the kind of special treat you'll be hard-pressed to share.
₹8,50,000 (approx.)

Glenfiddich
MR PORTER
20

Glenfiddich Mr. Porter

So brand spanking new you're not likely to chance upon on it on Indian shelves for a few months, this single malt is raised in hand-selected casks of new American oak, ex-bourbon, and European oak sherry casks. To be fair, though, just that bottle is incentive enough to start the hunt to acquire it.
Price on request

CHIVAS
REGAL
XII
12

Chivas New 12 Y.O.

An usquebaugh classic in a dapper new avatar, this new limited ed by Chivas is meant for the collector in you. Though it's not as if you needed another excuse to stock up on the wild heather and orchard fruit notes of this honeyed Speyside.
Price on request

GLENLIVET: COURTESY OF PERNOD RICARD INDIA. SUNTORY WHISKY TOKI AND BOWMORE: COURTESY OF BEAM SUNTORY. COPPER DOG, JOHNNIE WALKER, AND UNITED EPITOME: COURTESY OF DIAGEO INDIA. GLENFIDDICH, 100 PIPERS, KAMET, OAKEN GLOW, MACALLAN, AND CHIVAS: COURTESY OF BRANDS.

Johnnie Walker Blue Label

A blend wherein only one in every 10,000 casks qualifies to bear the Blue Label badge, you know you're getting exclusivity with this JW edit. This ultra-premium, oaky-toffee whisky will have you seriously considering a conversion to being a blends man.
₹29,560 (approx.)

Bowmore 12-Year-Old Islay Single Malt

If you like a dram rich with history, this single malt—matured in one of the world's oldest Scotch whisky maturation warehouses near Loch Indaal—will serve you well. The symphony of smoke and honey makes it equal parts mature and youthful in its sweet decadence.
Price on request

GQ CLASSICS
GQ CLASSICS

The Glenlivet 18 Y.O.

Another Speyside classic that's frequented our list in the past, this single malt is a repeat contender for its oaky sultana-and-sherried-peel nuances, which it owes to maturing in first- and second-fill American oak and sherry casks.
₹7,915 (approx.)

Kamet

An underdog that hasn't been given its due thanks to shinier releases, Kamet is a choice single malt that finds its origins in the foothills of the Himalayas. Look to this home-grown whisky for a fruitier profile, with enough vanilla, caramel, and chocolate wafting on the nose to bring Wonka's factory to mind.
₹2,999 (approx.)

United Epitome Reserve Peated Single Malt

If you count yourself a collector, one of the 3,600 numbered bottles of this home-grown single malt should make it to your shelves before it sells out faster than Yeezy 350s. We're partial to its cabernet sauvignon–cask finish, which infuses it with tones of mulberry, mint, and plum.
Price on request

100 Pipers Blended Malt Scotch, Aged 8 Years

Ideal to reminisce about the last days of winter as it slips away into a sunny spring, this eight-year blend is rife with Christmas notes that burst with the season's memories. You'll find a liberal dose of soft pear, apple crumble, cinnamon, citrus, and sea salt in this fruit-heavy whisky.
Price on request

Oaken Glow

With enough smoke to rival a cigar lounge, this new blend of aged Scotch malts is ideal if you like a good peat-fired usquebaugh. The malts that make it hail from Dalmunach by the river Spey, and leave you with a smooth, smoky finish.
₹720 (approx.)

OPENING ACT

A little over a year ago, Shubman Gill's youthful fearlessness at the Gabba put an India Test win back on the agenda when few had envisioned it as a possibility. After a difficult nine months, during which he's twice been injured, the 22-year-old opener is keen to get back to ironing out the chinks in his batting armour and correct a few misconceptions.

BY JAMIE ALTER

SHUBMAN GILL, aged 21 and in his third Test match, is batting on 65 on a stinking-hot Brisbane afternoon during the Australian summer of January 2020 (yeah, it's the southern hemisphere). It's day five of a riveting final Test match between Ajinkya Rahane's bruised and battered Indian cricket team and hosts Australia at their fortress of the Gabba where no Australian cricket team has been defeated since 1988.

The hosts have set the target of 328 runs for India—which no team has ever chased at the Gabba. Far from chasing it, India isn't even supposed to be alive in the series at this stage of the tour. But here they are, up 2-1, playing the last possible 11 they could have cobbled together after losing at least one vital cricketer from their squad during and between each Test match of the series. All three results are possible.

Mitchell Starc, left-arm quick, has the red ball in his hands. He runs in for the first over of a new spell on an up-and-down surface on which the cracks are playing tricks and the ball has begun to misbehave. Starc's second ball is short outside off stump and Gill pulls it wide of mid-on for four. Thwack. Inside the cavernous stadium—where, due to pandemic restrictions, there are very few spectators—the shot echoes.

Starc gives the batsman a look and turns on his heels. The short stuff continues. The next ball is top-edged over the deep-square-leg fielder and fetches Gill two runs. Starc goes even shorter, and Gill again opts to pull. The result this time is a solitary run, down to the man stationed at fine leg for the mis-hit horizontal-bat shot. In Starc's fourth over of that spell, Australia's quickest bowler is banished from the attack by Gill—who, in successive deliveries, hooks him for six and slashes over the gully and past

→
OPPOSITE PAGE
Blazer, waistcoat, shirt, and trousers by **Line Out Line**

HAIR AND MAKE-UP: SAHER GANDHI. LOCATION: ITC WINDSOR, BENGALURU. ENTERTAINMENT DIRECTOR: MEGHA MEHTA.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NEHA CHANDRAKANT
STYLED BY SELMAN FAZIL

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midwicket for straight fours. In 24 deliveries, Starc concedes 37 runs. In this frenetic passage of cricket, Gill collects 34 runs off 26 short-pitched deliveries.

For a generation of Indian cricket fans weaned on an assembly line of Indian collapses on Australian soil—barring a couple of spirited wins—this kind of assault from a rookie is unheard of. But Shubman Gill has been preparing for this moment since the age of five.

IT IS 2003. In the back garden of the Gill household in the village of Jaimal Singh Wala in Punjab's Fazilka district, a four-year-old Gill is batting against a plastic ball. An oversized bat in hand, the little kid has been connecting sweetly and hitting the ball back against the wall in front of him with ramrod precision. Unbeknownst to the child prodigy, his father Lakhwinder has been observing him. What the elder Gill sees leaves him impressed; his son may just have something special about him.

"I used to practise by throwing the ball at the wall and it used to come back and then I would straight-drive it back. The ball would again come back to me and I would drive it back again. This would continue for hours," recalls Gill from his home in Chandigarh. "While doing this, you get into a streak in which the ball is continuously hitting the wall and coming back and you repeat that shot. When you're that young, it is easy for the ball to go astray and hit the side of the wall. But I was hitting it dead straight, about 20 to 25 times in a row. Seeing that, my dad realized that I might actually be able to play. From that day, he treated my cricket seriously and thereon we started formal training."

Within a year, Gill was batting on concrete strips; he simply didn't have the option of playing on turf pitches. "It was very rare to get to play on a proper wicket, and even if we did they were under-prepared pitches," he says. "Since I was so young, my dad used to be scared *ki kahin bachche ko lag na jaaye* [my son might get hurt] because the wickets were under-prepared and the bowlers were all older. We played on concrete and cement wickets too, which was not ideal, so my dad was worried."

But all those sessions against bigger and stronger kids on those treacherous cement strips were what fashioned Gill's game, which is predominantly about swift back-foot movement. That is what helped define his batting and fetched him buckets of runs at the age-group level and then state and representative India levels and finally what earned him a Test debut at 21.

"I used to practise more with a light plastic ball rather than a tennis ball. Dad felt that if we weren't going to use a leather ball then a plastic ball was a better option as opposed to a tennis ball, because the plastic ball comes at you faster off the pitch," he says. "At that age, doing that so often helped me adjust to fast bowling quicker. I loved playing the plastic ball because it comes on faster and travels faster when you hit it. That helped me a lot later in my career. And hitting the ball sweetly and seeing it travel gave me a lot of satisfaction too."

There you go, Mitchell Starc.

GILL'S FIRST MEMORY of cricket is Sachin Tendulkar. He was three years old and sitting on his father's knee, watching India play on television. His father was a huge Tendulkar fan. Whether it was a live match or highlights reel, both father and son would sit on the sofa and watch.

"There used to be this one highlights package of his, specific to a series in England, which used to be showed constantly and I remember watching that a lot," recalls Gill. "Two shots of Sachin *paaji*'s stood out for me: the straight drive and the back-foot punch. The back-foot punch gave me a lot of satisfaction as a kid."

By time he became a teenager, that same back-foot punch had become Gill's signature shot—one honed on all those days batting on concrete. It would become his calling card.

To further his son's cricket career, Lakhwinder, an agriculturalist, moved the family to Mohali in 2007 and enrolled his son at the Manav Mangal Smart School. Though he played lawn tennis, basketball, football, and table tennis, it was cricket that Gill obsessed over. He cut his teeth during this period even as he scored heaps of runs at school level.

By his own admission, Gill was "a very good student"—he'd score 94–95%—until class seven when academics started going over his head. "Especially math, because when the theorems set in after plus-minus-multiplication arithmetic, it makes no sense," he chuckles.

As Gill kept enhancing his name as a batsman and putting his school on the map, he realized that those around him—teachers, coaches, students—had started to view him differently because of his cricketing achievements. He is indebted to the supportive environment he had at school, particularly his teachers and classmates, who "knew I was not coming to classes not because I was outside having fun but rather doing well at cricket, for the school. And they understood that putting too much academic pressure on me could be detrimental. I specifically remember my classmates helping out, even at that young age."

It is this zest that he brings to his first *GQ* shoot on the lawns of the iconic ITC Windsor hotel, that abuts the verdant greens of the Bangalore Golf Club.

At 11, he was selected to represent Punjab at the Under-16 level. He finished his first competitive tournament as Punjab's highest run-scorer and decided that he wanted to become a cricketer. "Before that I had not played any professional cricket, only local tournaments. Once you get to play a little bit of professional cricket, that's when you, as a player and person, gain some confidence. That was the point when I said, 'OK, you can do this.' Then I went from U-16 to the state level, where I was again the highest run-scorer. By then I believed that I could do this."

When he was 12, Gill was picked as one of the local batsmen for a specialist bowlers' camp for U-25 players which was overseen by former Test cricketer Karsan Ghavri. During this camp, a practice match was held and he was included. Clearly, Ghavri had seen something special in the boy.

"This match had many of Punjab's big cricketers: Manan Vohra, Jiwanjot Singh, Mandeep Singh. I got the chance to play among them and I was the highest scorer in that game," recalls Gill with a touch of pride in his voice. "I was 93 not out in a 60-over match. Scoring those runs against a very good bowling attack gave me a lot of confidence and belief. To perform in a team comprising state level and IPL cricketers gave me plenty of confidence. That inning changed me."

MANY YOUNG INDIAN cricketers have found the jump from U-19 cricket to first-class too hard to handle; countless have fallen by the wayside. From

→
OPPOSITE PAGE
Coat, shirt, and trousers by
Line Out Line

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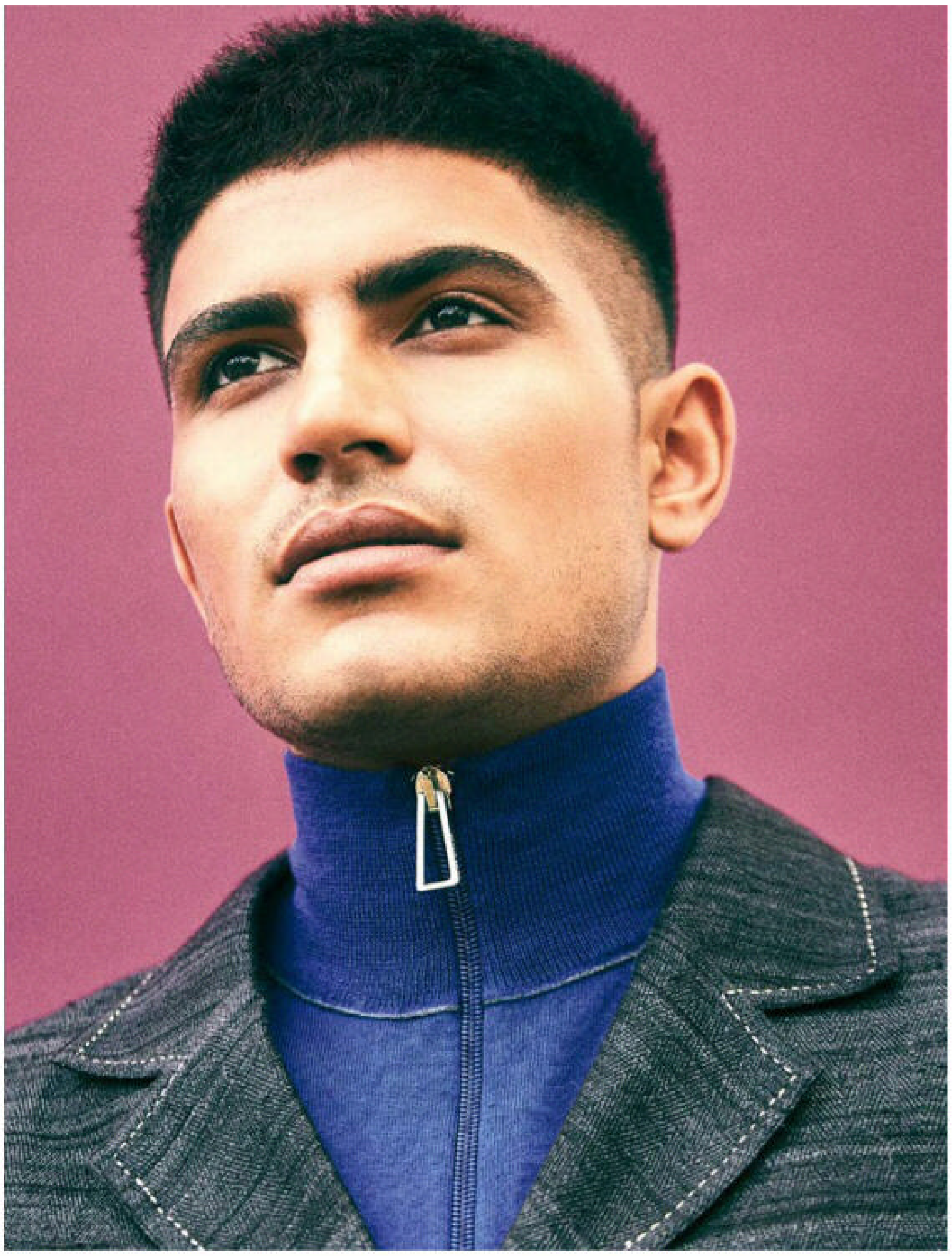
Gill's first memory of cricket is Sachin Tendulkar. He was three years old and sitting on his father's knee, watching India play on television.



his state of Punjab itself there were several teenage prodigies who faded into obscurity. One of his junior World Cup predecessors moved to the U.S. and drove a truck, such was the weight of expectations. But Gill was different.

Even as he emerged from the victorious 2018 U-19 World Cup in New Zealand as the "player of the tournament", he had played enough cricket to adjust to the demands of first-class cricket. Ten months after the World Cup, Gill reeled off his first double-century at first-class level: 268 from 328 balls for Punjab versus Tamil Nadu in the Ranji Trophy. The hype looked real and talk of his impending India debut grew louder.

As a teenager, Gill had balanced learning about himself while playing all three formats and travelling and handling fame and insecurities because, as he put it, he didn't think too much. "*Tab toh mann mein tha ki yaar jitna zyada* cricket *khelne ko mile, utna achcha hai* [I just wanted to play as much cricket as was possible]. You're 16 or 17 getting a chance to play India U-19 and India A, and you're the youngest in the side—what better opportunity could there be? What better exposure? I just wanted to play and enjoy the game and have fun. That was my thinking. I didn't dwell on anything else. It was about adjusting yourself for so many matches across formats. *Bas maze karne the tab* [I just wanted to have fun]."

The India call finally came, and on 31 January 2019 he made his international debut in the fourth ODI of the New Zealand tour. Virat Kohli walked up to him and casually informed him of his selection. Gill tried to hold his composure and then rushed back to his hotel room to call his parents.

He didn't do anything of note on tour—scoring 9 and 7—and went back to scoring runs for Punjab, India A, and Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL. This earned him a Test call for the tour of Australia in late 2020. He didn't feature in the series opener in Adelaide, which India lost badly, and was playing tennis with good friend Mohammed Siraj at the team hotel in Melbourne when he found out he and his good mate from the India A journey had been inked in for a Test debut after BCCI tweeted the 11 for the second match.

"There cannot be a grander occasion or venue to make your Test debut. I was so thrilled," he says, "and happy for Siraj because we'd believed that we would represent India together."

Having been thrust into Test cricket after the debacle of 36 all out at Adelaide Oval and at a position where batting has never been more difficult in the game's history, Gill looked the complete package. At the MCG, he scored 45 and 35 not out in an India win for the ages. At the SCG, scores of 50 and 31 culminated in an epic draw. At the Gabba, he made 7 and 91.

He says he will never forget the "casual" manner in which the Australians celebrated Rohit Sharma's dismissal on the final morning and how it spurred him on. "It was as if they knew the procession had started. They celebrated casually. *Ho gaya kaam*–types [Like their work is done]."

Bad move, Aussies. Gill and Cheteshwar Pujara put on 114 for the second wicket, a partnership he dominated with sizzling stroke play. When Starc came on to bowl during the afternoon session, something inside Gill shifted.

"As a youngster making your debut in Australia, the biggest doubt in your mind is whether you will be able to hand the pace. Pat Cummins and Starc are known for their pace and Josh Hazlewood for his line and length. But when I was able to conquer that doubt and I felt comfortable handling that pace, then it was all about my mindset," he says.

On the last day in Brisbane—keeping in mind the end from which Starc was bowling and bouncing boundaries at us, that is to say from the shorter end—Gill's game plan was to score runs. "He and Cummins were bowling short at us and my idea was to attack Starc," he explains. "If you go back and watch that innings again, you will notice that not once did I pull Cummins. The pull shots were off Starc, keeping in mind the shorter square boundary from that side. I felt that even if I got a top edge, it would clear the fielders and get me boundaries because he was bowling at good pace. The end from which Cummins was bowling had a much bigger boundary, so I told myself to only attempt the pull shot against Starc and leave the short balls from Cummins alone. The idea

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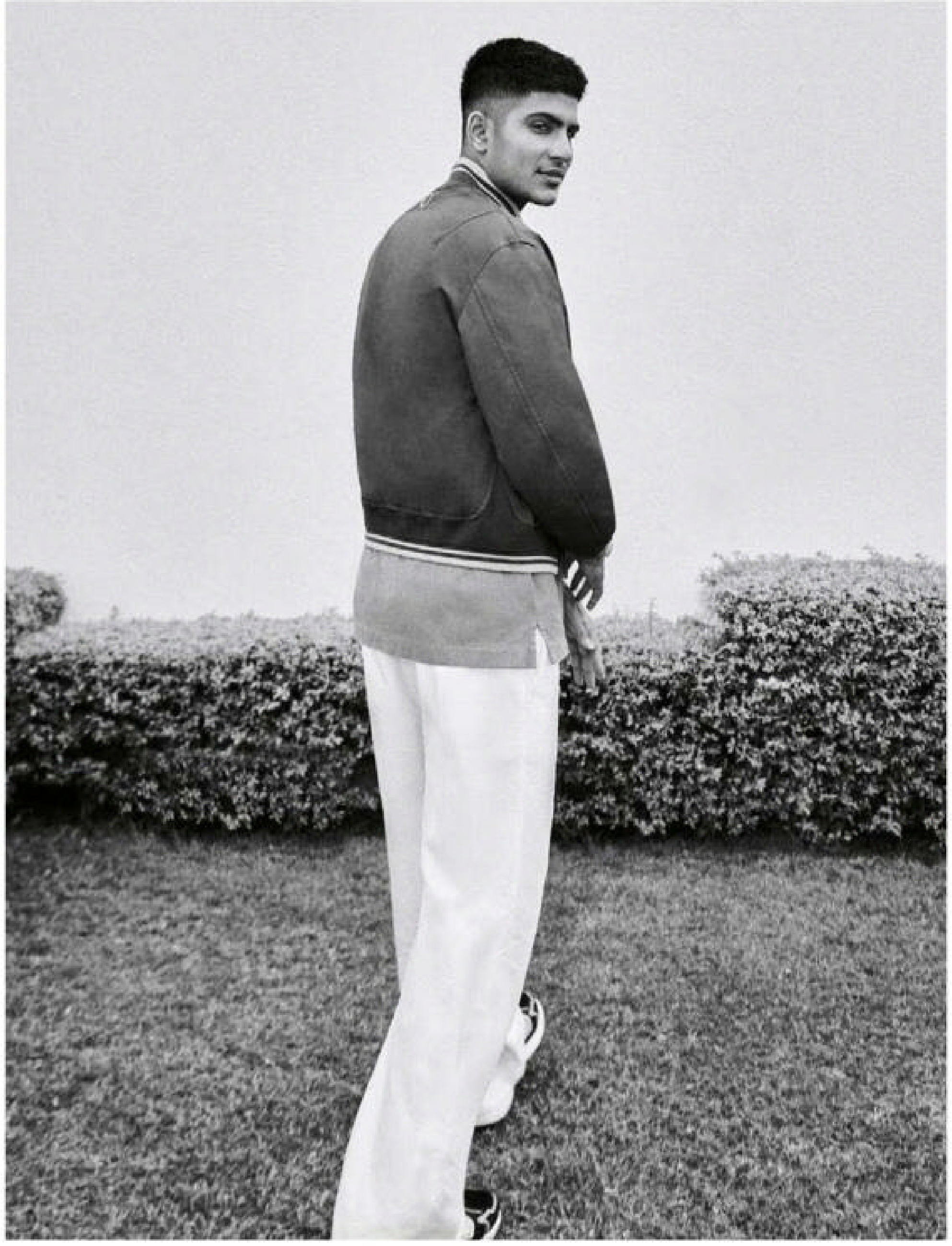
was to hit every bouncer that Starc sent down, and it paid off for me that day."

At the Gabba, Rishabh Pant's heroic unbeaten 89 will forever be linked to this unprecedented win. But it is Gill's vivacious innings of 91 that also made that result possible. While many of Australia's cricket journalists and former players were marvelling at his pedigree—and wondering where their own Gill was—in Indian cricket circles there was talk of him being an 8,000-run Test batsman and murmurs of a potential future Test captain.

A year on, his career has failed to replicate that high. He returned to India and struggled across four Test matches against England, scoring one half-century in seven innings. He didn't click during the World Test Championship final versus New Zealand and flew back from England with a shin injury. Scores of 52, 1, 44, and 47 followed on his return to the Test team at home in December, but then the same injury resurfaced and he missed the tour to South Africa. As his nascent Test career continued, an apparent weakness against the fuller, in-coming delivery surfaced. He was bowled thrice and trapped lbw four times.

"What generally happens is that you start to second-guess yourself and think that you're doing something wrong suddenly, that some problems have crept into your technique. You start to wonder why runs aren't coming as freely as before. This can be true but it is not guaranteed that that's exactly what is happening," says Gill as he recalls the dispiriting dismissals of 2021 when his capacity for losing his wicket just as he appeared established at the crease began to raise doubts in people's minds.

"You get good deliveries. You get some that you can't do anything about. But from my experience, I can say that what happens is that you often get out anticipating a certain type of delivery and then [caught off-guard by] another kind. It's more of a mental battle. How long can I stay in the moment? How long can I trust my instincts? You've put in so many hours of practice and here you are, trying to avoid one particular delivery by telling yourself that you cannot get out to that ball, and then you get a normal, straightforward delivery on the stumps and it gets you out. That's what I mean when I say it's a battle to control your mind, that you just have to play the ball and your instincts are going to take care of everything else. The key is not to overthink; it is the most important thing when you're going through a bad patch."



It is striking that Gill is honest enough in addressing his recent fallibilities. He is conscious of the need to add patience to his sublime shot-making skills but he isn't one to sit and mull over failure or what the critics have to say. He is certainly awaiting the call to rejoin India's Test team, now that he's "a couple of weeks" away from making a full recovery. He knows there is talk of his leadership skills but isn't thinking of the India captaincy as it is "not in my control".

He's seen fame and big money early, having fetched himself a ₹1.8 crore IPL price tag with KKR in 2018. He's rubbed shoulders with team co-owner Shah Rukh Khan and other movie stars and celebrities and is rumoured to be dating Sara Tendulkar—neither she nor Gill have denied these, but several social media posts of the two have fuelled speculation—and yet he credits his humble origins and old gang of friends for "keeping me on the ground".

After a difficult year in which the pandemic-induced bio-bubbles have taken a huge toll mentally—"You don't have the same passion or fire in you to get up every morning and repeat the same things you've been doing for a month or two"—Gill is happy getting some time away to listen to The Weeknd's new album, *Dawn FM,* and his current favourite Punjabi musicians Karan Aujla and Arjan Dhillon while thinking of all the designer watches he intends to purchase some day. "*Abhi voh mere aukaat se baahar hain* [All that is beyond my means]," he says self-deprecatingly.

What does Gill identify as the major difference between him now and four years ago, post the rush of the U-19 World Cup? "The calmness that comes from experience," he says swiftly and emphatically.

It is that calmness, more than ever before, on which Shubman Gill will need to rely on when he next marks out his guard at the crease for India.

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He says he will never forget the "casual" manner in which the Australians celebrated Rohit Sharma's dismissal on the final morning and how it spurred him on.

Joule in the crown

Turns out 630 Nm of instantly delivered torque is all it takes to convert you to the cause of EVs. By PARTH CHARAN

ELECTRIC VEHICLE ownership may be far from the norm but the spectre of electric performance has officially begun to loom over our collective subconscious. Having driven more EVs this year than I have in the past decade, I thought I was more or less familiar with what a high-powered EV power train had to offer—instantaneous torque; smooth, silent movement; and the contentment that comes with leaving zero emissions in your wake. Despite this, nothing prepared my senses for the Audi e-tron GT.

It takes a gigantic leap of faith in the market's EV prospects to launch a full-blown electric performance car. Especially when most brands are testing the waters with relatively humdrum electric SUVs. Audi, however, has gone full throttle, having launched five EVs this year. The fourth one being the e-tron GT—a stunning four-door power sedan that looks like a concept car rendering turned real. Design differentiation is going to be key for brands, given how similar EV performance is likely to be in the future. And Audi has no cause for concern on the design front because the e-tron GT is a magnificent-looking car. Every little design detail is exquisite, from the accentuated wheel-arches to the large 20-inch rims. Even in this muted shade of "tactical green" the e-tron GT saw more than its fair share of flashing cameras in my all-too-brief time spent behind its wheel. The scooped bonnet, the hunkered stance—Audi's design team were tasked with bringing to life a childhood fantasy car of sorts, and they didn't disappoint.

The e-tron GT comes to life with an innocuous-sounding whirr. The artificially induced electronic overture emanating the moment you slot it into "Drive" foretells just what you're likely to experience next. Armed with the curiosity and confidence that only an empty stretch of tarmac can evoke, I bury the throttle in the footwell, which instantly activates the GT's boost mode, giving it 527 bhp of peak power and 630 Nm of torque, which unleashes instantly. I'm thrown back in my seat as if heel-kicked in the diaphragm by a poltergeist. Despite moving forward in total silence, there is nothing gradual or subtle about the GT's accelerative prowess. It requires a complete recalibration of your senses. I can only imagine what sort of havoc its more powerful sibling, the RS e-tron GT, would unleash on your colon.

After the heady rush of its bonkers acceleration, the ascent to triple digit speeds is eerily lacking in sensation, as is the case with most EVs. Throw it into a corner, and the e-tron GT has its next party trick ready for deployment: gobsmackingly flat cornering. For a performance car, this shouldn't come as a surprise, but when this is done with the drive mode set to "Comfort", where it's unaccompanied by stiff suspension, the experience is truly novel. This is all thanks to the bottom-heavy nature of EVs, with the battery packs spread across the car's floor giving it a lower centre of gravity. This is astonishing enough in SUVs, but in something as low-slung as the GT, it works particularly well. Throw in the unbreakable adhesion of Audi's quattro system, you'd have to do something truly daft to break traction.

The e-tron GT is equipped with two electric motors: a 235-bhp one powers the front axle and a 432-bhp motor powers the rear axle. When not in boost mode, the combined output is 472 bhp and 630 Nm extracted from a 93 kWh battery. Not groundbreaking, considering

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF AUDI.

POWER TRAIN
Two electric synchronous motors; 93 kWh Li-ion battery

POWER AND TORQUE
537 bhp; 630 Nm

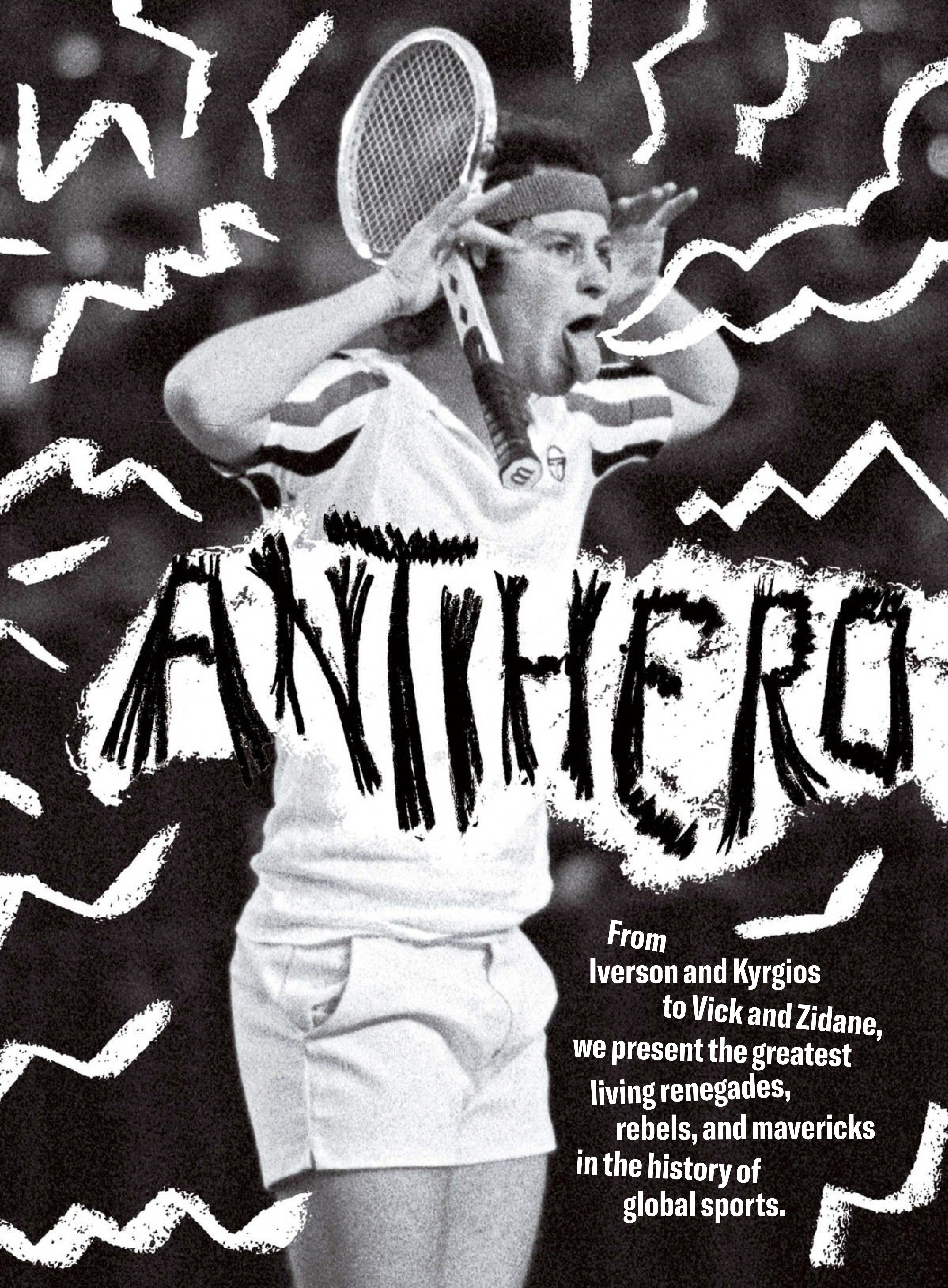
& FYI

The Audi e-tron GT has a real-world range of 350 km and costs ₹1.8 crore (ex-showroom).

the 589 bhp and 830 Nm of torque put out by the RS e-tron GT. But the GT, even in standard “quattro” form is so much more than the sum of its parts. And the parts, of course, are fewer than the ones you’d find in a conventional performance sedan like the RS7. For example, there’s only a two-speed transmission for the rear motor, and yet the steering features paddle shifters behind it. At first glance this may seem like an attempt from Audi to keep this otherwise space-age car from feeling a bit too alien. In reality however, the paddles exist to modulate regenerative braking—the force with which the car decelerates before the regular brakes have to be applied. Let’s not forget, this is a two-and-a-half-tonne car, holding as much momentum as the Sydney Opera House would if it fell from the sky. Audi also gives you fade-resistant, carbon-ceramic discs as optional extras, for the same reason.

The rest of the cockpit is thankfully lacking in brushed aluminium surfaces and other faux-futuristic visual embellishments. Inside, this is still very much a contemporary Audi, with a “Virtual Cockpit”, 10.1-inch touchscreen, and a funky, asymmetrical dashboard. Storage space is subpar and a full-sized smartphone isn’t tucked away with ease. It’ll need to be, because when you mash the throttle, anything that isn’t pinned down will be thrown back, along with your eyeballs and spleen. One of the more visually distinct aspects about the cabin is the all-glass sunroof, sans retractable cover. There’s a carbon-fibre option available too, but since this car is practically impossible to flip over, you can go with the glass option that offers spectacular views.

Like most petrolheads, I too started out with apprehensions about the appeal of electric performance. As daily drivers, EVs are incomparable in terms of ease of driving and ownership. But can a machine running on the same juice as your smartphone bring about the same sense of drama? And the same level of engagement? The e-tron GT is a proper four-door, glass-top theatre. Everything about it feels novel and cutting-edge. And the way it just vanishes into the horizon with minimal noise never fails to leave bewilderment in its wake—much more preferable than plumes of CO$_2$.



ANTIHERO

From Iverson and Kyrgios *to Vick* and *Zidane,* we present the greatest living renegades, rebels, and mavericks in the *history* of global sports.

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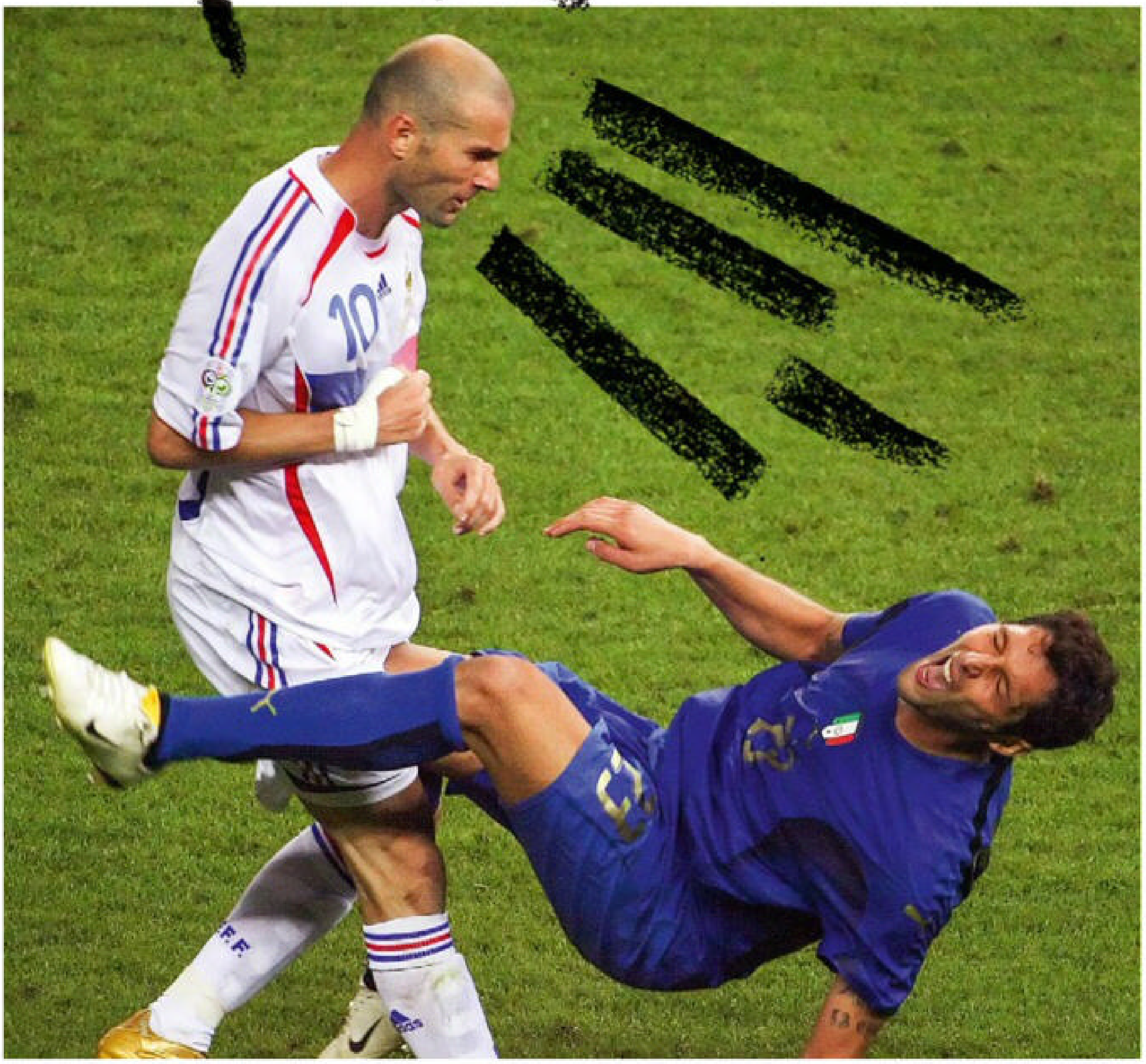
WHEN YOU'RE YOUNG, you're told to be like the star on the Wheaties box, the MVP, the all-American hero. But sometime later, in your early teenage years, maybe, a different, darker shade of athletic superstar takes hold in your mind. The punks and the bad boys, the *uncoachable* hotheads, the men who mirror your own angst and inner rebellion. You're 16 years old and totally transfixed by ski god Bode Miller, missing the podium but making the party. The sphinx-like Zinedine Zidane, inexplicably headbutting an Italian defender in the last gesture of his career. The mulleted John Daly, teeing off with a Marlboro in his mouth. As long as there have been sports, there have been athletes with the swagger to defy convention. Those who played only by rules they wrote for themselves. And in so doing, they've updated more than merely the game—they've changed the culture. To management and commissioners and coaches and agents, they are often nightmares. But to the fans, they are something like gods—even when they play like devils. They remain the people's champs. And the most human heroes of all.



Zinedine Zidane

If you saw it live you can still picture it all these years later: the sudden lowering of the shoulder and forward thrust, the terse exchange with the referee after the red card, the ignominious walk off the pitch past the trophy-in-waiting. Zinedine Zidane's shocking headbutt of Marco Materazzi in the waning minutes of the 2006 World Cup final—Italy prevailed over Zidane's French squad on penalty kicks—marked the end of a career defined as much by the sublime as the despicable. Eight years earlier, Zidane, the son of Algerian immigrants, had tasted World Cup glory, leading a multiracial French team to victory over Brazil. "With one World Cup he unified a fractured nation," ***Men in Blazers*** **co-host Roger Bennett told** ***GQ.*** **"His two headers in the 1998 final shattered the myth of Brazilian invincibility and utterly silenced the French right wing. And then he used another World Cup to tear all that largesse right down." We're left trying to square the moments of astonishing artistry with those of deplorable rage. The man capable of producing an exquisite left-footed volley to win the 2002 Champions League also racked up 14 career red cards, including one for another headbutt, in 2000, of Hamburg player Jochen Kientz—a haunting foreshadowing of his final moments on the pitch.** —ERIC WILLS

TRAE YOUNG

Philadelphia. Hawks vs. Sixers. Game 1 of the second round of the 2020 NBA playoffs. Atlanta's Trae Young had shut down Madison Square Garden days before, and now, as Hawks fans cheered his every bucket like the Rapture was imminent, the message was clear: Young was the league's most delightful new villain, and this was his coming-out party. He plays like he was born to be bad: the dishevelled hair, the "fuck you" threes from the logo, even the twerk of his limbs, the thrill of contorting his body to draw the nastiest fouls on his opponents. Philadelphia is supposed to be the city of underdogs, and here's Knuckles the Echidna nutmegging grown men with crossovers, daring someone to check him into the cheap seats. There's something beautiful about watching a lawbreaker get away with his crimes. And in the NBA, there is no bolder antihero right now than Trae Young. If this is the future of the game, bring it on.
—TYLER R. TYNES

OPENING PAGES: JOHN MCENROE, BETTMANN/GETTY IMAGES; TRAE YOUNG, TRIBUNE CONTENT AGENCY LLC/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. THESE PAGES: ZINEDINE ZIDANE, JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; TRAE YOUNG, KEVIN C. COX/GETTY IMAGES SPORT/GETTY IMAGES; DARRYL STRAWBERRY, TONY INZERILLO/ALLSPORT/GETTY IMAGES; KYLE TROUP, BOB LEVEY/STRINGER/GETTY IMAGES.

Darryl Strawberry

“When I reflect, I’m like, man, you were pretty crazy back then,” says Darryl Strawberry, almost 60 and decades removed from his years as a hard-partying, hard-playing outfielder. He *was* crazy—crazy good. The first pick in the 1980 MLB draft, Strawberry used his wiry six-foot-six frame to blast 335 career homers, becoming an eight-time all-star and four-time World Series champion, winning with both the Mets and the Yankees. Though he says the New York fans brought out the best in him—“I loved the fact that fans would boo you when you sucked,” he says—the New York lifestyle didn’t always. He was suspended three times for substance abuse, and admitted to entertaining ladies in the clubhouse between innings. “Everything is different on the East Coast because everything on the East Coast stays open 24/7,” says Strawberry. “I went to the club at night and didn’t come out until eight in the morning, and I got a ball game that afternoon.” Back then, Strawberry says he was “broken, lost, and living a life completely all wrong” off the field. Now he’s almost 20 years sober, a pastor, and has started a ministry and a foundation to help children with autism. So what advice would he give his 18-year-old self? “Listen to your mother.” —CLAY SKIPPER

KYLE TROUP

Kyle Troup didn’t set out to buck convention. The Afro’d son of bowling legend Guppy Troup, he picked up the sport when he was just three years old. So he did what all kids that age do: He grabbed the ball with two hands and let it rip down the lane. And then he did it again. And again. For the rest of his life. “I had to bowl two-handed because I didn’t have enough strength to bowl one-handed,” says Kyle, who would sometimes catch flak from traditionalists who thought his style was goofy, perhaps even unmanly. “But luckily for me, as I got older, my father never tried to change my style.” He stuck with it: Bowling with two hands gave him more control, more power, more rotations-per-minute. And now, he’s not only one of the highest earners in the bowling world, he’s also part of a new vanguard changing the sport. “Twenty, twenty-five years ago, nobody really knew about two-handed bowling,” he says proudly. “Fast-forward to today, 60 percent of all youth bowlers are probably bowling two-handed.” As for his wild fits—bright blue pants, shirts with flames—that’s all thanks to Dad, too. “Guppy wore wild pants, very wild designs back in the ’80s. It’s a Troup tradition.” —CHRIS GAYOMALI

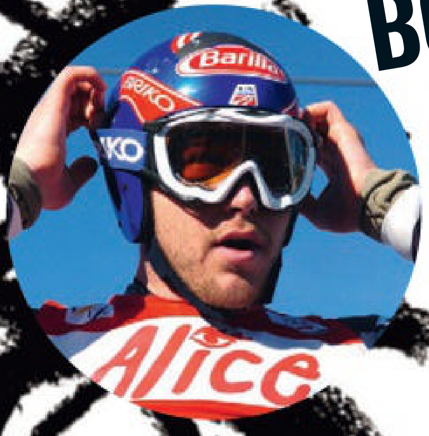
Allen Iverson

Allen Iverson's breakthrough moment came at the 1997 All-Star Game in Cleveland. He wore cornrows. "That was huge," says journalist Chris Broussard, who covered that game. "In the Black community, that was just a natural hairstyle. But the thought had always been, when you step into white America, you had to play the game, tone it down. Now it was like, 'Wow, this dude is really being Black in mainstream America.' Allen's message was, 'Be yourself.' He was merging hip-hop and basketball. That was a first." Iverson, known for his ankle-breaking crossover dribble, had crossed the cultures of the game he lived for and the music he lived by. He was also simply being Allen Iverson, a product of Newport News, Virginia—Newport "Bad" News, as it was called by residents of its projects. His whole career, Iverson did it his way: lived his way, dressed his way, played his way. He owned every dribble with an honesty his haters could never deny. His famous rant about missing practice is much quoted. A final salvo to reporters near the end of that press conference is less remembered: "I bleed like y'all." Did he ever. Such heart this man has. —SKIP BAYLESS

Kieron Pollard

The latest in Trinidad and Tobago's storied line of cricketers, Kieron Pollard is renowned for his volcanic power. Built like a heavyweight boxer, he holds the bat like a broom in his mammoth grip. Last March, he became one of three batsmen to hit 6 sixes in an international over when he smashed the hapless Sri Lankan spinner Akila Dananjaya to all parts of Antigua's Coolidge Cricket Ground. At 34, Pollard is celebrated as a hero, yet he was long cast as a villain—a mercenary who prioritized club over country, focusing on the lucrative T20 format of the game. Raised by a single mother in a tough town outside Port of Spain, Pollard made the hard choices in his career he needed to in order to survive. The rise of T20 cricket over the past decade coincided with his emergence, and he plied his trade in leagues across the world, becoming a lavishly compensated star. "The criticism against him wasn't fair at all," says Trinidad and Tobago's national cricket coach, David Furlonge. "Cricket is no longer just a sport—it's a livelihood. It's also how Kieron has looked after his family."
—CHE KURRIEN

BODE MILLER



Just how bad was Bode Miller's bad-boy image? Bad enough that his own uncle called him the "greatest underachieving ski racer in history". Bad enough that his most famous Olympic moment didn't come on the slopes but when he told a reporter, after missing the podium in '06, that at least he "got to party and socialize at an Olympic level". As Miller, now 44, reflects, "There were certainly moments where I was defiant for the sake of being defiant—but we're talking less than 1 percent of the time." What looked like defiance, he says, was authenticity. The American public wanted as many medals as possible—a priority that Miller didn't share. "If I blew out my knee racing, I didn't want to look back and be like, dang, I should've done something different. I wanted people to see me enjoying my life and having a party and charging." Charging meant attacking every downhill, even if it cost him the race. "I raced 450 World Cups," he says. "I crashed in 200-plus of them." But he still won six Olympic medals. "Am I proud of what I did, and how I did it?" he asks. "The answer is a resounding yes." —CLAY SKIPPER

ALLEN IVERSON: ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NATIONAL BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION/GETTY IMAGES. BODE MILLER: EDDY LEMAISTRE/CORBIS SPORTS/GETTY IMAGES. KIERON POLLARD: GETTY IMAGES. NICK KYRGIOS: ROGER PARKER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO. CAM NEWTON: AUBREY LAO/GETTY IMAGES SPORT/GETTY IMAGES. LUIS SUAREZ: LARS BARON/GETTY IMAGES SPORT/GETTY IMAGES.

NICK KYRGIOS

"I haven't had a coach for about five years now," says Nick Kyrgios, the 26-year-old Aussie tennis star whose untamed playing style has made him one of the most controversial players in the gentleman's sport. Kyrgios has a booming serve and a fearsome forehand, weapons that have helped him take down the Big Three on multiple occasions. And he's done so while putting on a show nearly every time he steps on the court, hitting cheeky underhand serves, physics-defying tweeners, and overhead jump smashes that rival Vince Carter's dunks in flamboyance. (He says he's always wanted to bridge the gap between the "exciting" NBA and "boring" tennis.) Coaches tried to straighten him out for years (and mitigate his occasional on-court meltdowns), but Kyrgios only knows one way to play: like himself. "I'm just on my own wavelength, man. I don't really give a fuck about what the media says or anything like that. I'm just trying to be better every day.... I just always wanted to be myself out there." —SAMUEL HINE

Cam Newton

He's the NFL's most defiant *provocateur* in the pocket, the modern Black quarterback who set American football on fire. A man like that is bound to come with a slew of haters, but Newton smiles through it all. "Being around Cam, there's an immediate gravity and energy you haven't felt before," says Marshall Newhouse, an offensive tackle who used to block for Newton on the Carolina Panthers. "If you're around football long enough, you grow up expecting this corporate, CEO type at quarterback. That's what most owners want, someone buttoned-up and mostly white. But Cam? Cam just broke the mould." —TYLER R. TYNES

Luis Suárez

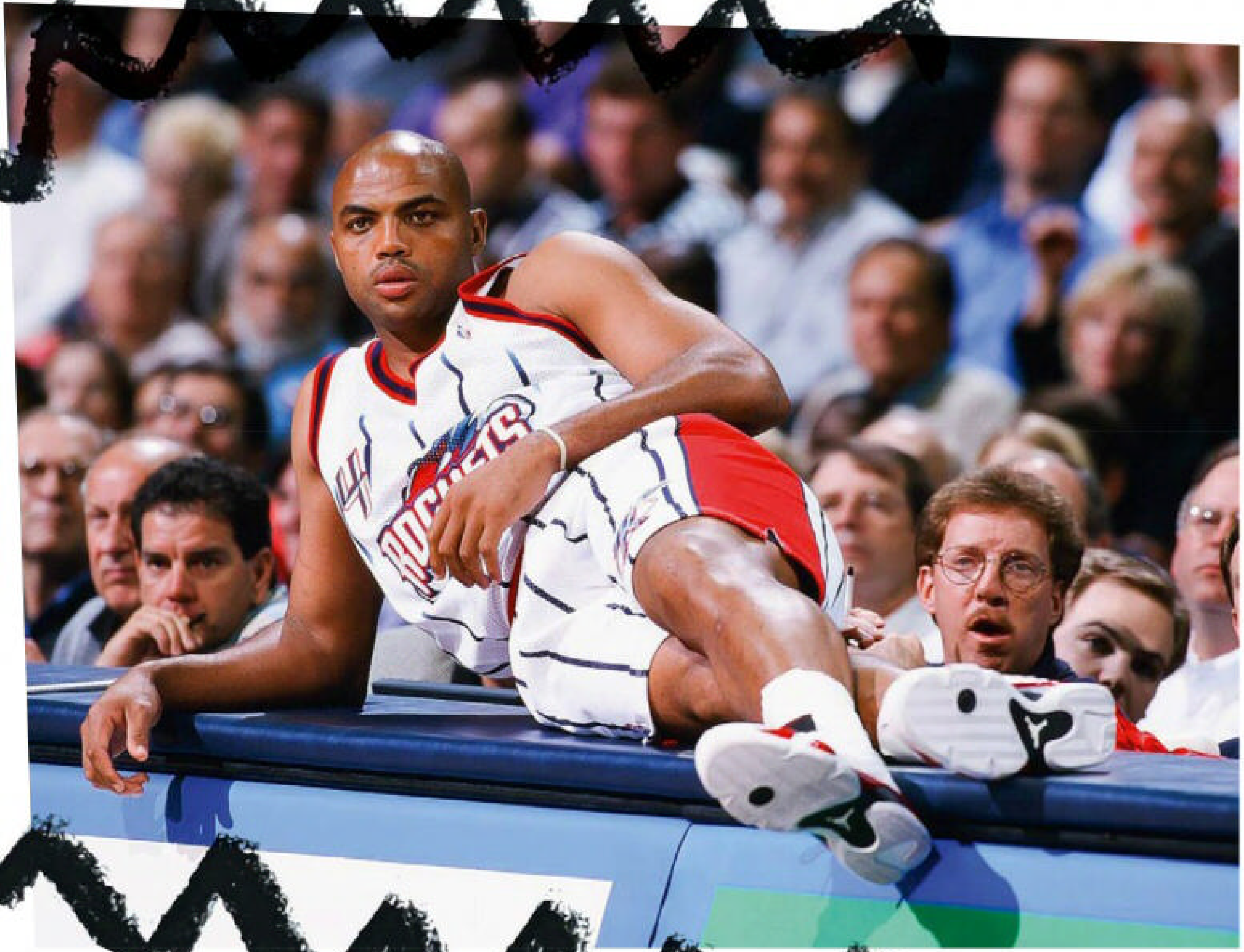
It wasn't just the biting, as shocking as it was to see Uruguayan football star Luis Suárez attack the shoulder of the Italian Giorgio Chiellini like a plate of ribs during the 2014 World Cup—the *third* such time he had chomped down on the opposition. It was also the dramatic diving. And the devilish handball in the 2010 World Cup that denied Ghana a sure goal and led to Uruguay's quarter-final victory. And the racially charged row with Manchester United's Patrice Evra that earned him an eight-game ban. Off the pitch, he was shy, sweet even; on the pitch, he transformed into something else entirely, something even his wife didn't recognize. "He was as close as world football has had for a long time to a WWF-level wrestling heel," Roger Bennett told *GQ*. "But a wrestling heel capable of sublime moments of otherworldly football domination." Suárez won the European Golden Shoe twice, interrupting Ronaldo and Messi's stranglehold on the award, but you could never be sure what you would get—a wonder goal or something more sinister. "There is a sense in South American football that the ends justify the means," said Bennett. "It was the mental side of his game, the *garra charrúa*, the warrior spirit, that would take him to some pretty dark places." —ERIC WILLS

Kimi Räikkönen

“Iceman is his nickname, because he comes from Finland, a cold place, but he also seemed a fairly cold person. This is the kid who turned up giving monosyllabic answers as part of his disdain for the press, who was fast asleep half an hour before his first qualifying session. He joked about taking a shit when Michael Schumacher was being given a lifetime achievement award, but it underplays how seriously he took it. He had a singular focus, which was to drive cars as fast as humanly possible. The other bullshit? He never had any time for it. Formula 1 hasn’t seen anyone like him since James Hunt. All Ferrari drivers usually have to learn Italian so they can speak to the Italian press. Kimi never bothered so he could never be forced into talking to them. He went and drove rally for a bit and famously would have the car in a ditch or in a tree within the first 150 metres. He was all or nothing.” —WILL BUXTON

MICHAEL VICK

He was the first Black quarterback to be drafted at number one in NFL history; he was also the first number one quarterback draft pick to go to federal prison, for dogfighting charges, at the height of his career. So go the contradictions of Michael Vick, a one-of-one in sports history: still the most electric athlete to ever play the position but fated to be remembered by some for other reasons entirely. Vick played with swagger and style and grace; he drove opponents to insanity and beyond. There was no defence for him, except what he would do to himself—and even then, after 14 months in prison, he was still able to return to the game, reformed, humbled but unbowed, and once again make grown men look silly. LeSean McCoy, a teammate of Vick’s in Philadelphia, remembers his arrival in the city. “There would be so many protesters outside the stadium,” McCoy says. “But once he started playing? It’s funny how the world works—they forgot about all of that.” —ZACH BARON



Charles Barkley

He brawled with Shaq on the court; off the court he pushed a man half his size through a bar window. Charles Barkley always seemed intent on proving that his infamous not-a-role-model Nike campaign wasn’t just a slogan. But in retirement the former MVP has managed to up the ante with his unrepentant provocations. On his gambling: “I want to be dead broke when I keel over. I don’t want to leave all that money for my freeloading family.” On the Golden State Warriors: “I’m never going to like that little girly basketball where you have to outscore people.” As Kenny Smith, his *Inside the NBA* co-host, told *GQ:* “He has, as Shaq would call it, a G5 classification. He can say things that other people can’t say. I know where he stands, even when he’s not standing with me.” —ERIC WILLS

KIMI RÄIKKÖNEN: CLIVE MASON/GETTY IMAGES SPORT/GETTY IMAGES. MICHAEL VICK: BRIAN FINKE, GQ, 2003. CHARLES BARKLEY: THE SPORTING NEWS/GETTY IMAGES.

John Daly

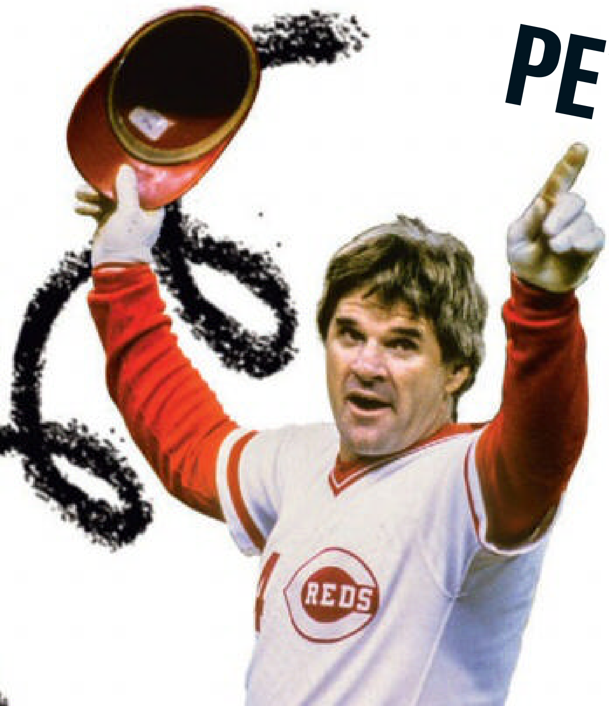
"That guy was Happy Gilmore" is how *No Laying Up* podcast host Chris Solomon describes the blond bomber John Daly. Raised in rural Arkansas, Daly was a hellraiser from the moment he entered the golf world's consciousness. "He came in with a mullet and a moustache," Solomon notes, as the final alternate for the 1991 PGA Championship field. He drove overnight to get there on time, and then won the thing with a howitzer of a swing that revolutionized the sport. "People think Bryson [DeChambeau] blows the field away—he blew the field away more then than Bryson currently does, which is jarring to think," Solomon says. And Daly did it with his own unique brand of panache: "Hitting balls shirtless or off beer cans" in practice or rocketing drives inches over the heads of fans in the grandstand. He's still finding ways to upset the golf establishment: Each year, come Masters time, Daly stations his R.V. in the parking lot of a Hooters just down the road from the world's most esteemed country club, where he autographs just about anything put in front of him. In 2019, Augusta National bought the land that Hooters sits on. But Daly isn't going anywhere just yet. —SAM SCHUBE

Gabriel Medina

Surfers are a chill bunch, the kind of folks genetically predisposed to lounge in the sun with guitars and fruity strains of indica. But occasionally an apex predator emerges from the haze—a guy like three-time world title winner Gabriel Medina, who is beloved in his native Brazil and despised just about everywhere else. On land he's a smiley 28-year-old who likes video games. But in the water he's a ruthless competitor. Take the 2017 Pipe Masters. His opponent, Kelly Slater, was standing in the barrel of an enormous back-door wave on which he could have scored a perfect 10. So Medina did something highly tactical—or highly unsportsmanlike. He burned Slater—his idol—by dropping in front of him. The two almost collided, nixing Slater's chances of scoring enough points to prevail. Medina won the heat, but fans online were incensed, calling him a disgrace. "I could be going against my best friends. I'm there to win," Medina once said. "It's in my blood."

—CHRIS GAYOMALI

PETE ROSE

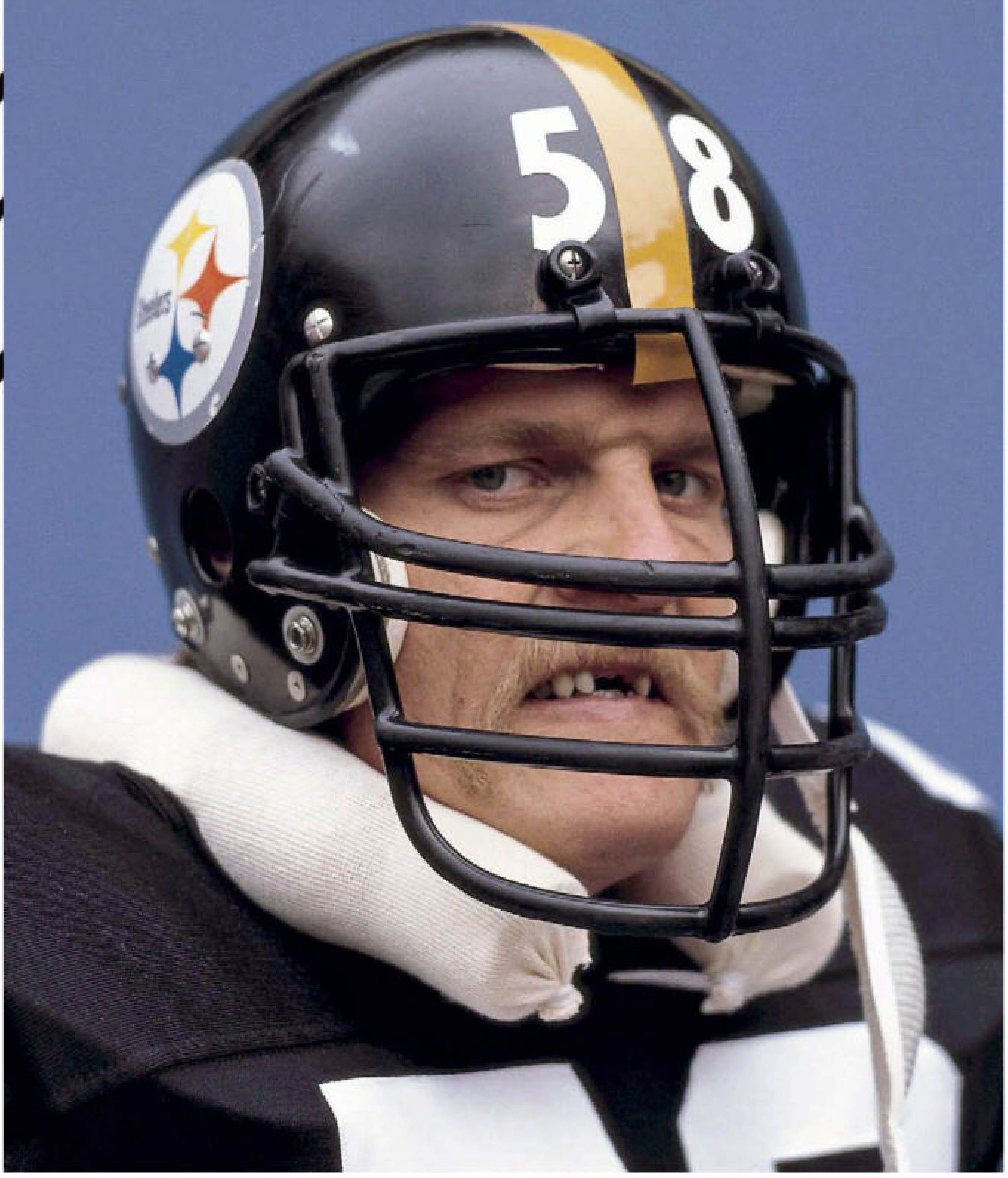


"What do I have—26 or 27 major leagues records? The best record I have is playing in 1,972 winning games. Someone's gonna win and someone's gonna lose. My philosophy is: Let the other guys lose. A lot of guys played hard, don't get me wrong. But I played different than most guys. Not three days a week, not five days a week—I played different every freaking day. And when I managed the Reds, my goal every night was to win the damn game. See, I picked the wrong vice. If I'd done drugs, they'd have given me a second chance. But I gambled. I was wrong, no question. I made a mistake. But everybody makes mistakes. The penalty don't fit the crime. I've been suspended over 31 years. I've heard of guys that killed somebody and they're out of jail after 20 years. I'm still in jail. Thirty-one years. 'Cause I made a bet. I bet on baseball. That's not my legacy. My legacy is I won more games than anybody, got more hits than anybody, scored more runs than anybody. I was at a banquet the other night and a guy asked me, 'What do you think you'd hit if you were playing today?' I said, 'Probably .228 to .235.' And he said, 'Wow, the pitchers are that good?' I said, 'No, I'm 80 fucking years old.' " —PETE ROSE, AS TOLD TO CLAY SKIPPER

JOHN DALY: STEPHEN MUNDAY/ALLSPORT. GABRIEL MEDINA: ED SLOANE/WORLD SURF LEAGUE. PETE ROSE: FOCUS ON SPORT/GETTY IMAGES. ALL: GETTY IMAGES.

Asashōryū Akinori

It took only four years for Asashōryū Akinori—a young Mongolian man with the agility and fighting spirit of a prey-hungry wolf—to rise to the top of the deeply traditional Japanese world of sumo wrestling. Known for his impassioned outbursts, his gutsy poses in the ring, and his struggles outside of it, Asashōryū was a far cry from the image of the yokozuna, or sumo master, as a man of restraint and discipline. Yet his dynamic fighting style and carefree smile drew in countless people—even the elders who relentlessly criticized his impropriety came to regard him as a natural-born charmer. Twelve years have passed since his sudden retirement, and the sport still misses the sense of possibility and surprise he brought to it. "I've been told to be dignified, to be refined," he once said. "But once I stepped into the ring, I felt like I had to be an ogre." —KEIGO AMEMIYA



Jack Lambert

The mere sight of Jack Lambert—as unsettling as any Bond villain with his toothless maw, thinning hair, and spit-flying intensity—once made a Broncos rookie named John Elway wonder whether his own true calling was to be an accountant. Terrorizer of quarterbacks everywhere, Lambert embraced his odious image: During a game in 1974, the Steelers lineman and Ohio native announced that he hailed from the fictional town of Buzzard's Breath, Wyoming. After flattening Brian Sipe along the sideline a few years later (the first of two fine-inducing hits on the Cleveland quarterback), Lambert told Howard Cosell that if they wanted better protection, quarterbacks should wear dresses. In retirement he guarded his privacy with the same intensity that animated his Hall of Fame career: "Jack would rather wrestle a rattlesnake than talk to a reporter," one neighbour told a journalist who came knocking. *GQ* left a voicemail asking Lambert if he had any comment about his inclusion on this list. Naturally, he did not return the call. —ERIC WILLS

JOHN McENROE

You cannot be serious! It's the title of John McEnroe's autobiography, the punchline in his commercials now, and occasionally, when prompted, he'll say it from the broadcast booth. McEnroe originally yelled it during a Wimbledon match, in 1981, during a tournament that he'd go on to win, beating Björn Borg after losing to the Swede the year prior in one of the greatest matches ever played. That was, and is, McEnroe: an *enfant terrible* (the All England Club, the organization that runs Wimbledon, declined to offer him membership, as is customarily extended to champions). But McEnroe was also among the most dogged athletes ever to walk the face of this earth. If you beat him, he was coming back. And he was coming back for blood. He was the quintessential antihero: Audiences loved to boo him; his greatness was inseparable from the angry, abusive intensity that produced it. Tennis is a lonely, solitary, brutally difficult sport, played over hours in difficult conditions; there is no one to ask for help, no one to pick you up when you cannot pick yourself up. The best players are separated from each other less by ability than by will. Can you find the intensity inside yourself? Can you maintain it? McEnroe always could—and, maybe more than any other athlete, he let you see it. We loved him and hated him because he made the ugliness and the fire that fuelled his talent visible, tangible, unavoidable. To watch him was to learn just how hard, and how transcendent, it is to win. —ZACH BARON

ASASHŌRYŪ AKINORI: SANKEI. JOHN McENROE: MIKE MALONEY MONTE FRESCO/MIRRORPIX. JACK LAMBERT: TONY TOMSIC/GETTY IMAGES SPORT CLASSIC. SONNY BILL WILLIAMS: SANDRA MU/STRINGER. DETROIT PISTONS: NATHANIEL S. BUTLER/NBAE. BRAD MARCHAND: STEVE BABINEAU/NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE. ALL: GETTY IMAGES.

SONNY BILL WILLIAMS

At the finals of the 2015 Rugby World Cup, in London, New Zealand's strapping centre Sonny Bill Williams made an audacious move. Receiving the ball at the halfway mark, Williams burst forward, drawing five burly Aussies into his orbit. He waited for his opponents to close right in, and with a delicate flick of his giant wrists, offloaded the ball into the hands of his dreadlocked teammate Ma'a Nonu, who charged into clear air to score a decisive try. It was a flashy play, and the teeming fans at Twickenham stadium thundered in exaltation. It was also the most sublime execution of "the offload"—a signature Sonny Bill Williams move—which, until that moment, the rugby orthodoxy had disparaged as showboating and risky, akin to an Allen Iverson behind-the-back pass. Today, the offload is recognized as a vital component of the modern game, and Williams stands vindicated. "If I hadn't backed myself and pushed the boundaries, would I have achieved what I did?" asks the All Blacks legend. "When no one expects it, big plays in big matches change the course of the game." —CHE KURRIEN

The Bad Boys Detroit Pistons

When I think of Detroit, I think of an ass whippin', at least when it comes to basketball. Michael Jordan might, too. And Motor City's blue-collar edge is still best personified by the Pistons of the late '80s and early '90s, still the league's ultimate Bad Boys. Their line-up was a murderers' row of hard men—Dennis Rodman, Bill Laimbeer, Isiah Thomas. But they were also winners in a town that had often lost. "For a city of hard-working people that got hit real hard, we brought light to the city," says John Salley, a power forward who won back-to-back NBA championships with the Pistons in 1989 and 1990. Yet Salley says he and his cohorts were also proud of being pariahs outside of Motown. "When they show you a cowboy movie," he says, "the bad guy is always the best-dressed and the one you remember." —TYLER R. TYNES

Brad Marchand

Slashing. Trash-talking. Tripping. If it gets under an opponent's skin, the Boston Bruins winger has probably done it, earning him a reputation for being the game's foremost psycho. At a 2012 White House visit, even President Obama, diplomatic as he is, referred to Brad Marchand as the "Little Ball of Hate". ("I thought that was awesome," says Marchand, now in his 12th season with the Bruins.) In 2020, his fellow players concurred, voting him the dirtiest player in the league. Sometimes it's sneaky wallops to the back of opponents' legs; sometimes it's licking their faces, which he's done on at least three separate occasions. "The guy had his face in my face, so I just figured that would piss him off," Marchand offers by way of explanation. (Spoiler: It did!) He claims his pesky brand of antagonism is mostly behind him, partly because it's hard to get away with, thanks to all the cameras, and partly because he doesn't need it anymore. "It's stuff I had to do early on to get established and try to earn a spot on the team and make a name for myself, whereas now I am established and I've had a successful career," he says on a day he's serving a three-game suspension, the seventh of his career, for intentionally swiping a player's legs out from underneath him. —CLAY SKIPPER

Yellow Fever

The Mercedes-AMG A45 S 4Matic+ is a hot hatch gone supernova. By PARTH CHARAN

THE LOW KERB weight–high power combo never fails to enthral petrolheads. It's an age-old recipe to make cars faster: saw unnecessary bits off, strap on a bigger engine, throw in a bigger turbocharger—whatever works. Whether you're prepping for a track race or a moonshine run, the combination of big power on a small frame is a timeless speed hack, precisely why hot hatches work. They have just the right level of firepower, which, given their compact frame, makes for spirited driving.

The Mercedes-AMG A45 S seems to have gained entry into the hot hatch club through a technicality. Is it a hatch? Sure. Is it hot? It's scalding. With 415 bhp of power, derived from a 2.0-litre, four-cylinder engine, this car is the Floyd Mayweather of featherweights. There's no logical explanation for how a trifling four-pot motor can generate this much power. There's no logical reason why the A45 S goes as fast as it does. It's a result of Affalterbach sorcery and a perfect demonstration of just how Mercedes-AMG manages to win the Formula One Constructors' title year after year.

In this particular shade of canary yellow, it's impossible to resist. It's a car I've awaited for over half a decade. Back in 2015, Mercedes-Benz India brought over the CLA45 AMG, giving us a taste of just what sort of low-compression cocktail they could whip up. The CLA45 managed to eke out a good 355 bhp from a series production 2.0-litre twin-turbo engine. A Herculean feat of engineering when you consider the fact that modern-day rally cars with similar displacement max out at roughly 380 bhp. And they only need to run for a brief period before heading back to the paddock for a tune-up. The milder Mercedes-AMG A35 rode in recently, with a good 301 bhp. The new Mercedes-AMG A45 S, however, is in a league of its own.

In the metal, it's big. Gone are the compact, diminutive dimensions you associate with hot hatches. This is a big, muscle-bound bruiser of a performance car with AMG's massive Panamericana grille, bulging louvres on the bonnet, air intakes that could suck in a poodle—all pointing to some ferocious performance. AMG's flair for the dramatic is evident in every corner and crevice of this car. It's pouring out of its flared fenders, wide track, quad-exhausts, and that throaty bark it emits upon ignition. It doesn't take long before that bark turns into a proper roar, as you switch to "Sport+" or "Race". It's missing the crackling exhaust note that accompanies the more powerful V-shaped engines found in bigger AMGs but it's just as eager, clawing at the horizon the second you mash the throttle. Once again, logic goes straight out of the window, as the motor readies itself to put a V6 to shame. The twin-clutch, eight-speed gearbox quickly works its way through the initial set of gears, with the mid range delivering on the promise of seemingly limitless torque.

MERCEDES-AMG A45 S 4MATIC+

ENGINE
2.0-litre, twin-turbo petrol

POWER
415 bhp

TORQUE
500 Nm

GEARBOX
Eight-speed, dual-clutch automatic

PRICE
₹79.50 lakh (ex-showroom)

Another thing that stands out is just how much feedback the steering offers. The front wheels are frantically reading the fine print on the tarmac while the engine attempts to simply brush past all of that and constantly attempt to take flight. The ride quality is bone-crunchingly stiff, even in "Comfort", a common AMG ailment. But on the plus side, the stiff suspension and anti-roll bars make for such resolutely flat cornering prowess, you can go past most bends flat out.

The hot-hatch formula relies on weight and size playing a greater role in performance than sheer power. With the A45 S, that balance is lopsided. It's a big, wide thing with *sports car* written all over it and slotting it under "hot hatch" feels particularly cruel to similarly shaped cars. Because none of them have a fighting chance if pitted against this absolute torpedo. In fact, full-blown sports cars are advised to think twice before going up against this thing. ✖

GQ FYI

The A45 S features the world's most powerful series-production four-cylinder engine.

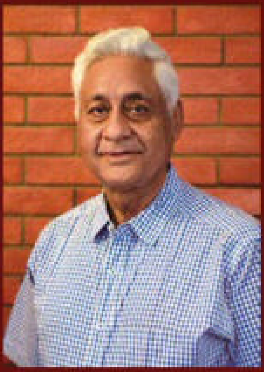
PHOTOGRAPHS: PARTH CHARAN.

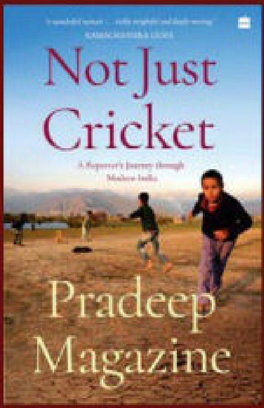
SOURAV GANGULY: GETTY IMAGES. PRADEEP MAGAZINE: SUNIL GHOSH. BOOK: COVER DESIGN, SAURAV DAS; PHOTOGRAPH, SAJAD RAFEEQ.

Cricket Diaries

A veteran sports journalist's evocative memoir offers a ringside view of India's beloved sport.

BY ARUN JANARDHAN




Not Just Cricket
A Reporter's Journey through Modern India
Pradeep Magazine

From anecdotes about Sourav Ganguly to the state of cricket journalism in our country and how caste plays a role in the sport, Pradeep Magazine's no-holds-barred memoir tells it like it is.

Cricket writer, columnist, and former sports editor Pradeep Magazine's new book, *Not Just Cricket: A Reporter's Journey Through Modern India,* as the title suggests, is not just about the sport. In this memoir, he also writes about the meaning of identity, being Kashmiri, growing up in terror-stricken Punjab, and social and political upheavals over the last 50-odd years, told through the prism of a cricket writer.

"When I found out that the New India Foundation was looking for books on Indian history and culture, I thought I had a bit to say," Magazine says over a Zoom call. "I thought of combining my cricket reporting journey with what was happening at the time around the country."

The former sports editor of *The Pioneer*, *India Today,* and *Hindustan Times* began his career as a reporter with *The Indian Express* in Chandigarh in 1979 before becoming the newspaper's cricket editor in 1999. Before he sat down to write this book, Magazine went to the Punjab University library in Chandigarh to scan newspapers dating back to the 1970s, particularly *The Indian Express* and *The Tribune*. While the *Express* carried his own writings, the *Tribune* reported more extensively on what was happening in Punjab and Kashmir.

"I have never spent so much time in one place—even when I was studying for exams," Magazine says, laughing at the daily average of six hours that went into the research process. "From the beginning to the end, it took around two years as I am not a fast writer. It was not easy; I had to connect cricket with current events and find dates that matched. Memory plays tricks on you, so fact-checking was crucial."

Written in Magazine's signature pared-down prose, the book is an account of major events in the country interwoven with cricket anecdotes, controversies, and conflicts. Additionally, it is also an insider's account of the many dressing rooms he was privy to. As an editor and influential sports writer—an increasingly rare breed—Magazine had access, trust, and editorial freedom, which shows in the book.

Edited excerpts from the interview:

One of the interesting bits of trivia from the book was about how Pakistan had better television telecasts than India's Doordarshan in the 1970s. Was the strained relationship between the two countries a loss for cricket?

Since Amritsar was close to Lahore, there was this PTV feed we would get and most Indian families would watch Pakistani serials, which are still popular. They also had much better coverage of sport, such as the footage of boxing where all of Muhammad Ali's bouts were shown live.

When India plays Pakistan, it's seen as this big rivalry that may be fuelling animosity. But a lot of people miss out on its power to bind hearts. When India went to Pakistan—I have a chapter on my travels to Pakistan—it was a revelation to see the warmth [they have] for Indians. It's a big loss not just for sport but also for India and Pakistan.

How has cricket writing evolved through your time?

I grew up reading Ron Hendricks, Rajan Bala, and K.N. Prabhu. They were great stylists and wonderful writers. They wrote lengthy reports because they had enough space to create an atmosphere that indulged their writings. One important aspect to this, when I began, was that the print reporter was an important person. There was no TV. What you wrote was the final authority. I have seen players scared, literally, of people like Ron and Prabhu. Players would worry

that if these journalists wrote something negative, it would affect their careers. Now, it doesn't matter. Match reporting is almost redundant. Instead of lengthy reports, you have 200- to 300-word pieces. It's a dramatic shift—much like Test cricket and T20.

There is more about Sourav Ganguly in the book than any other player.
When he became captain, I had wider access to the goings-on of the time. I was also [planning] to write his biography. So I had researched him a bit while he was still playing. I've met his parents a few times and even been to his house.

That was a dramatic period—especially for off-field events, with the Ganguly–John Wright relationship, Ganguly–Greg Chappell–Rahul Dravid. I happened to be involved with it, as the book mentions. I would go to Ganguly with a tale, or Dravid [laughs]. They show how journalists and cricketers interacted with each other, how players are human. Besides, there are chapters on Kapil Dev, Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar–Mohammad Azharuddin. They are thematically linked—the interplay of personal relationships and ambitious cricketers wanting to do well and how it all plays out.

> **"What stands out about all cricketers is their self-belief and tremendous confidence in their own capabilities."**

In your interaction with these cricketers, was there a common denominator?
What stands out about all cricketers is their self-belief and tremendous confidence in their own capabilities and their ability to handle pressure. I have never seen a cricketer with greater self-belief than Kapil Dev. Also Ganguly, for example, was out of the team, and had been portrayed as some disruptor with no chance of a comeback. You'd talk to him and you'd feel sorry because he kept talking about how he would make a comeback. You'd wonder what was wrong with the man—but he came back and did well.

What made you include off-the-record conversations in the book?
I gave it deep thought. I wanted to tell the world what had happened without [assigning] any blame. I don't know if I have succeeded. These players are not villains. They are not revealing sensitive information about their private lives or things that should not be written about. These are issues that are affecting them as players and their team. I have taken care to not paint anyone as a villain. Maybe Chappell is the only character in the book who comes across as someone not [acting] in the best interests of the Indian team at the time. ⌘

KAPIL DEV AND VIRAT KOHLI: GETTY IMAGES.

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The King in Waiting

Mohamed Salah is the best football player in the world right now. The world just hasn't quite admitted it yet.

BY OLIVER FRANKLIN-WALLIS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FANNY LATOUR-LAMBERT

STYLED BY JON TIETZ

adidas
LIVERPOOL FOOTBALL CLUB
Carlsberg

The

THE LORD MAYOR of Liverpool is wearing a nervous smile and a gold ceremonial chain the size of a saucer, the kind worn to greet royalty or a foreign dignitary—which feels appropriate, because it's not every day you get a visit from the Egyptian king. It's a cloudless fall day in the city, and star Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah has come to the town hall to film an interview with an Egyptian TV channel. The producers wanted somewhere aspirational, *opulent,* to film their national icon, and honestly they couldn't have picked better. The building is ostentatiously beautiful, late Georgian, all Corinthian columns and gold-filigree cornicing and crystal ballroom chandeliers that the Lord Mayor, a tiny woman named Mary, informs me each weigh a ton. The staff buzzes around nervously, chattering in low voices while the cameras roll in the next room. *Salah!* Even Mary, an Everton fan—and thus a supporter of Liverpool's most hated rivals—is excited. "I'm not a bitter Blue," she whispers, because all rivalries aside, who doesn't love Mohamed Salah?

In Egypt, where his life story is taught in schools, his nickname is the Happiness Maker. This is as much for his feats on the field—where he has in five seasons led a resurgent Liverpool to Premier League and Champions League titles, breaking umpteen records on the way—as his feats off it. He's got that million-lumen smile; the Afro-beard combo; the whole wholesome, hard-working, family-man image. In Nagrig, the village in the Nile Delta north of Cairo where Salah grew up, his generosity is legendary: He has paid to build a school, a water-treatment plant, and an ambulance station there, and every month his foundation provides food and money to the destitute.

Tales of Salah's beneficence occur so regularly that stories about it occasionally now crop up that aren't even true, but because Salah almost never gives interviews, nobody is around to dispel them. Others *are* true but would seem fantastical if there wasn't video and/or photographic evidence to confirm them, such as the time a bunch of assholes were picking on a homeless man at a Liverpool gas station, only for Salah to show up in his Bentley and defuse the situation, before giving the homeless guy money for somewhere to stay. (True.) Or the time that a thief stole 30,000 Egyptian pounds—about ₹1,44,427—from Salah's father's car, and the police caught the culprit, only for Salah to persuade his father not to press charges, and then actually *give* the thief money to help turn his life around. (Also true.) According to Stanford University researchers, Salah's arrival at Liverpool in 2017 correlated with an 18.9 percent fall in hate crimes in the city; in Egypt, his involvement in a government anti-drug campaign led to a fourfold increase in help-line calls. At this point it may not surprise you that at Egypt's last presidential elections, in 2018, there were widespread reports of voters spoiling their ballots and writing in Salah's name, despite the seemingly pertinent fact that he wasn't running.

Finally, some double ballroom doors swing open and here comes Salah, in a black Haculla hoodie and jeans and MSGM sneakers, being mobbed by what must be two dozen of the film crew all attempting to get a selfie with their idol. Salah goes along with it, smiling even though it's clearly a bit much, until eventually his agent intervenes and we take refuge in another equally splendid room that appears to be set up for a wedding. Salah sits down, hands in pockets, unfazed by it all. He is used to the adoration. "It's something I wanted," he says. "But not that much!"

Besides, this is nothing. If he were to step out onto the street right now in Liverpool—a city that reveres its football players almost as much as it does the Beatles—instant mob. In New York, he can't even stay at a hotel without some Egyptian staff member tracking down his room number and calling up to pay tribute while he's trying to sleep. (True.) And in Egypt itself? Well, I am unable to adequately convey the extent to which Salah is beloved in his own country, where the bazaars sell his face on every marketable household item, and streets and schools are frequently renamed in his honour. "Salah is the dream," Amr Adib, the Egyptian TV anchor who has come to interview him, tells me. "He is a role model. It is a success story: how you can begin from zero and become number one in the world." For a country that has struggled to get back on its feet since the Arab Spring uprising over a decade ago, Salah is something more than an athlete: He has become a paragon of how to live.

The responsibility can be overwhelming. Not long ago, Salah took his family—his wife, Magy Sadeq, and their two kids, Makka, 7, and Kayan, 1—back home to Nagrig for Eid. "I went out with my family just to walk and go to pray, and suddenly I see three or four hundred people outside," he says. The throng was so intense that they couldn't leave the house. Salah tweeted about it at the time—one of the few occasions that he has shown anger in public. "I was so mad. My mom was crying, my sister was crying, my wife was crying, because they wanted me to go on that day," he says. "My father was disappointed. I needed to be with them."

Still, he knows that it comes from a place of love. "I really do understand. People get excited to see you. It is what it is; you have to deal with it." He remembers what it was like, to be growing up without much. When I ask Salah about the incident with the thief, he at first tries to dodge the question, apparently not wanting to seem crass by discussing his own charity. So I press him: Why did he let him go? "I'm not supporting that [stealing]," he says. "But I'm sure he had a bigger reason to steal. I just feel he did it for a reason. When my father asked, the police said he was a really poor guy and had nothing in his life. So I told him: Just help him and leave him alone." Mohamed Salah knows first-hand how lives can change, and he is nothing if not a true believer in the power of second chances.

ON THE FIELD he is a winger who plays as a striker, a goal scorer of sublime quality and uncommon consistency. Salah marked his arrival at Liverpool in 2017

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Raggedy Threads

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by breaking the record for goals scored in a 38-game season; the following season, he led the team to its sixth Champions League title; the year after, the club won the Premier League title for the first time in 30 years. A freak team-wide injury crisis meant last season was a wash (they still somehow came in third). But this season Salah has ascended to another plane. At the time of writing, he has scored 19 goals and assisted nine more in just 20 games, putting him on track to break his own record. To watch Salah play right now is to experience the rare, thrilling sensation of an athlete's true peak revealing itself, like an alpine summit in clearing fog. As Jürgen Klopp, Liverpool's manager, told me via email: "At this moment, I think Mo can make a very valid claim for being the best footballer on the planet."

Throughout his career, Salah has been, if anything, underrated: discarded by Chelsea, twice ignored for the Team of the Year, including in 2018–19, when he was the league's joint top scorer. There is a long-held perception—unfounded—that he is selfish, that he shoots too much, or that he chases individual glory over team success. This is easily disproved by the numbers: No forward in the league has more assists than Salah since he arrived at Liverpool, not his regular Golden Boot rivals Sadio Mané or Raheem Sterling or Harry Kane. "He's the best sort of greedy," Klopp says. "He wants more for the team and more for himself, but the first part of that is what drives him. He wants us, the team, to win first and foremost." He has scored more Premier League goals than any African player in history, reached 100 goals faster than any other Liverpool player. Despite this, he has never broken into the top three for the Ballon d'Or, football's most esteemed individual prize. Partly this is just the misfortune of having existed at the same time as two of the greatest to play the game. But there's also the lingering sense that his game doesn't get the recognition it deserves.

Salah says it doesn't bother him. "I'm sure a lot of people appreciate what I'm doing. I don't really care about it. Weak mentalities like to feel that. I don't."

Anyway, this will surely be the year his doubters are converted. Crucially—highlights being to professional athletes as hymns to missionaries—he scores beautiful goals. Take the one he scored against Manchester City in October. Salah receives the ball outside the penalty area in a crowd of three opposition players, shrugs off one, rolls the ball past the other two with the sole of his boot, then surges into the box. You think he'll do what he always does, which is shoot with his left—but no, he beats the City centre back with a jagged cutback and hits it with his right across the goal face at an angle so acute that it hits the far post before nestling into the net.

Or his goal in the 2-0 win over Porto in November: First he plays a back-heel pass to Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson on the edge of the box, then runs on to Henderson's return pass. The ball is rolling perpendicular to the goal, toward a Porto defender, when Salah micro-momentarily shapes to shoot, and the defender dives to the floor to block it—but Salah hasn't even touched the ball. Only then does he control it so imperceptibly that the ball doesn't even change speed, and rifle it in at the near post with a deft sweep of his instep.

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This is Salah's greatest weapon: this sense that he's streaming reality on a faster connection than we are. He doesn't showboat, instead sprinting at defenders full pelt, waiting for the smallest misstep or shift of momentum that he can use to go past. "That's my game since I was young," Salah says. We're in his box after the Porto game, Salah cooling down in Nike sweats and Yeezys and snacking on blueberries and a Vita Coco. "I get the ball, I am coming to you. *I am coming to you!*"

The night of the Porto game, the Anfield crowd started singing his name in the seventh minute, and it was still emanating from nearby pubs long after the final whistle. Liverpool is, in many ways, the perfect fit for Salah. His face adorns the outside of the stadium and a flag in the fabled Kop section. Under Klopp the team has become notorious for overwhelming its opponents before they can even escape their own half, and the cruel effectiveness of this approach, known as *gegenpressing,* is really only possible to appreciate in person. The entire team hunts in packs, Salah yelling to his teammates to press high, forcing mistakes that might be quickly turned into scoring opportunities. These chances are produced not by delicate play but by sheer force of will—and Salah is better at converting them than perhaps any player alive.

THE BEST-KNOWN story about Salah is that as a kid he had to travel by bus—a nine-hour round trip—every day to get to training. This is also true. He learned to play the Egyptian way, on the streets, scrapping it out in the local youth leagues around Nagrig until he was scouted at 13 by Al Mokawloon, a team in Egypt's top division. Al Mokawloon, which Salah refers to by its English name, Arab Contractors, is based in Nasr City, a suburb of Cairo 82 miles south of Salah's home town. So every morning Salah would go to school at 7 a.m., then leave after two hours (the club gave him a permission slip) and walk a mile past jasmine fields to a bus stop. There he boarded a microbus—a camper van crammed with three or even four rows of seats—to nearby Basyoun. From Basyoun he'd catch another to Tanta; from Tanta to Cairo's bustling Ramses Square; and finally a fourth to the training ground in Nasr City. "Half an hour, one hour, then two hours, then maybe half an hour or 45 minutes for the last one," Salah says, ticking off the transfers from memory.

Training itself lasted only a couple of hours, but Salah would try to turn up early and stay late, starting the long journey home around 6 p.m. At the time, Al Mokawloon was paying him a monthly salary of 125 EGP—roughly ₹600—which didn't even cover bus fare for a week, so his father, who owned a jasmine trading business, covered the rest.

So many journalists have tried to re-create Salah's bus journey that their dispatches could fill an essay collection. None capture what it must have been like: the gruelling monotony, the social isolation, all mixed up with a 14-year-old's daydreams of going pro. "I know when we say nine hours this looks crazy, but I did it because I loved it," Salah says. "I wanted to be where I am now, so I didn't feel that it was that hard."

"THAT'S MY GAME SINCE I WAS YOUNG. I GET THE BALL, I AM COMING TO YOU. I AM COMING TO YOU!"

↑

Vintage shirt from **Melet Mercantile**

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Eventually, Salah impressed the coaches at Al Mokawloon enough that they gave him a room at the training ground, and by 17 he had broken into the first team. In old footage you can see the glimpses of what he would become—the quickness, the hunger. Then, in February 2012, a riot broke out at a stadium after an Egyptian league game between Al Masry and Al Ahly in Port Said. Seventy-four people were killed. In response to the disaster, the Egyptian authorities suspended the league and ordered that all games be played behind closed doors for two years, and in the aftermath, Salah's representatives secured a transfer to Basel, one of the biggest clubs in Switzerland.

For Salah, arriving in Basel was like plunging into ice water. "The weather's cold, and you can't speak English, can't speak the [Swiss German] language. No one in the club spoke Arabic," Salah says. At first he couldn't watch TV, read the newspapers, or even order takeaway. "It was really hard. But I needed to adapt to it, or go back. You don't have a third choice." On the field, his talent did not require translation. In two seasons, he helped Basel to back-to-back league titles and earned the league's best-player award.

What happened next is one of fate's curious what-if moments. In the winter of 2014, Salah had an offer to join Liverpool but instead accepted a move to Chelsea. It made sense at the time: Chelsea was the more dominant team. But the club was also stacked with star forwards and managed by José Mourinho, a coach notorious for rarely rotating his starting line-up. "When I look back, [I had] bad advice with the situation," Salah says.

London was an even bigger change than Switzerland. Soon after arriving, Magy gave birth to their first child, Makka. Back home, Salah's fame exploded. Then and now, an Egyptian player signing for a top Premier League team is virtually unheard of. But he struggled to get minutes at Chelsea, often left out of the squad entirely. Critics started saying that he'd moved too soon, that he wasn't suited for the more physical side of the Premier League. Salah stopped reading the news. "It was so tough for me, mentally. I couldn't handle the pressure I had from the media, coming from outside," Salah says. "I was not playing that much. I felt, 'No, I need to go.'"

The following year, Chelsea sent Salah out on loan to Fiorentina. He enjoyed Italy, played well, and in 2015 moved to Roma. At this point, plenty of equally talented players might have settled: *Okay, you had your shot at the top, but this is your level.* But Salah's rejection at Chelsea cracked something open within him, like a drill hitting groundwater. His motivation redoubled. "You have two choices: to tell the people that they are right to put you on a bench, or to prove them wrong," Salah says. "I needed to prove them wrong."

While he was still on the bench at Chelsea, Salah had started lifting weights more, building his upper-body strength. "I used to go every day because I knew I would not play," he says. (If you've seen Salah's shirtless celebrations, or his Instagram, you know it worked. The guy's abs look like freshly baked dinner rolls.) He started getting deep into self-help books like Mark Manson's *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck,* and bingeing YouTube videos by success coaches like Tony Robbins and Zig Ziglar. "The one I think changed [me] a lot is Napoleon Hill," Salah says. "He is one of the main guys who really talked about belief in yourself. For me, every book after that takes from what he said." (Ironically, Hill, the self-help pioneer behind best-sellers like 1937's *Think and Grow Rich,* is now thought to have largely fabricated tales of his own success. Fake it until you make it, I guess.)

It's easy to be cynical about self-help—*be positive, believe in yourself*—but for Salah, it's clear that it really helped, enough that talking to him now can sometimes feel like a motivational seminar. "The best thing you could have is a serious conversation with yourself. Just get a coffee and just sit like this and just ask yourself what you want," he says. And: "Some people can't face themselves properly. But I have no problem with that. If I'm struggling, I just face myself and just feel where I am."

In Rome, Salah rented a separate house in the city and built a private training pitch in his backyard so that he could work on his shooting outside of practice. He started to work on his mind too. He practices both meditation and visualization every day, running through the next game in detail, picturing both what he wants to happen and—because he read Michael Phelps does it—what could go wrong. "Some situations you need to face before it happens, so when it happens you've already experienced it," Salah says. He started this mental routine during his second season at Roma, which coincided with the best form of his career to that point. He scored 15 goals and made 11 assists, leading the team to a second-place finish in Serie A, which ultimately led Liverpool to come calling again. This time, he didn't hesitate.

Still, there are moments that even visualization can't prepare you for. In Salah's case, it was Liverpool's 2018 Champions League final against Real Madrid. The game should have been the Hallmark ending to Salah's record-breaking first season back in the Premier League. Instead, in the 25th minute, Madrid's infamously combative defender Sergio Ramos dragged Salah to the ground in an armlock, dislocating his shoulder. Salah left the field in tears. Liverpool, visibly deflated, lost the game 3-1. (After the result, a lawyer threatened to sue Ramos for 1 billion euros, citing "physical and psychological harm" to Salah and to the Egyptian nation.)

Worse, the injury ruled Salah out of the opening game of the 2018 World Cup. The tournament was only the third time Egypt had qualified, and the first in 28 years. Salah himself had scored the goal that secured his country's qualification, an injury-time penalty against Congo. By the time of Egypt's first game against Uruguay, Salah still hadn't recovered. "I cried on the bus, then I went to the toilet and cried on the toilet before the game, because I couldn't play," he says. Egypt lost 2-0. Salah did play in the next two games, scoring twice, but couldn't prevent his team from crashing out of the group winless.

Salah has said that he has come to accept the injury. "Injuries you can't really control," he says. "Everything happens for a reason, I believe, and you have to deal with it." In the end, he took strength from it. The following year Liverpool made it to the final again, and won.

SALAH'S LIVERPOOL CONTRACT is set to expire in the summer of 2023, at which point he will be a free agent. Salah has frequently said he wants to stay; however, negotiations with Liverpool's owners, Fenway Sports Group (which also owns the Boston Red Sox) over a new contract are at an impasse over Salah's salary demands—reportedly double his current deal, which would put him among the best-paid players in football. (Salah's representatives say reports that Salah is currently paid $13.8 million per year are inaccurate but otherwise would not comment on negotiations.) "I want to stay, but it's not in my hands. It's in their hands," Salah says. "They know what I want. I'm not asking for crazy stuff." And besides, sewage plants and ambulances don't come cheap.

To Salah, it's about more than the money. It's about recognition. "The thing is when you ask for something and they show you they can give you something," he says, they should, "because they appreciate what you did for the club. I've been here for my fifth year now. I know the club very well. I love the fans. The fans love me. But with the administration, they have [been] told the situation. It's in their hands."

If Liverpool is unwilling to match his wage demands—entirely possible, given FSG's reluctance to pay superstar salaries both at Liverpool and at the Red Sox—there are few clubs in world football who could. Barcelona is notoriously broke. Real Madrid seemingly has its sights on French striker Kylian Mbappe. There's Paris Saint-Germain, with its limitless Qatari-backed financing, but otherwise the only real contenders are the two Manchester clubs or Chelsea, and a move to any one of them would torch Salah's status as a Liverpool legend. (I will confess here that I have been a Liverpool fan for 20 years. Yes, I asked him to stay. No, it didn't help.)

Salah knows his own worth, and that his next deal may be his last chance to make big money. There is also brand Salah to consider: He has sponsorship deals with Adidas, Oppo, Uber, and Pepsi, each paying handsomely for his image. (MBC, the Arabic TV channel, reportedly paid Salah $650,000 to interview him that day at the town hall.)

He is 29 now. Conventional wisdom states that football players peak at around 30, although recent advances in sports science are changing that: Zlatan Ibrahimovic, for example, is still scoring for AC Milan at 40. "It's not just Zlatan," Salah says. "[Cristiano] Ronaldo is 36, [Karim] Benzema, 34. All the top

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Vintage tank top by **American Apparel from L Train Vintage**

Pants and shorts by **Prada**

Cleats by **Adidas**

“YOU HAVE TWO CHOICES: TO TELL THE PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE RIGHT TO PUT YOU ON A BENCH, OR TO PROVE THEM WRONG. I NEEDED TO PROVE THEM WRONG.”

players at the moment, [Robert] Lewandowski, Messi, all of them are 34, 35.” At his house, Salah has built his own recovery suite, including a cryotherapy bath and hyperbaric chamber—things you’d normally find only at a cutting-edge training facility or treatment centre. “I have everything at home. It’s a hospital,” Salah says.

“He’s like a sponge for information. He has an incessant hunger for being better,” Klopp says. “He’s never satisfied. He’s so attentive to what we are asking of him for what helps the team. But alongside that, his commitment to individual improvement is remarkable. Whether it be the fitness and conditioning coaches or the nutritionist or whoever, he looks for those small margins everywhere.”

Salah rarely speaks publicly, and never about politics. This, you feel, is partly self-preservation: Salah’s visibility in Egypt and the Middle East means anything political he says or does is immediately international news. In the Middle East and online, coverage of him can sometimes verge on moral policing: When Salah posted a picture on Instagram of his family celebrating Christmas, it led to a torrent of abuse. But controversy is a distraction, and so he has tried to remove that from his life too. He doesn’t go out partying, or often play video games, instead preferring to stay at home with his kids. “People really change with the fame and the money, so I’m just trying not to do the same, to stay steady,” he says. This, too, is all deliberate, an investment in ensuring he can hit his maximum potential and stay there as long as possible.

■ ■ ■

IN LATE NOVEMBER, a few days after our meeting, France Football held the annual Ballon d’Or awards in Paris. The black-tie gala, attended by football’s elite players, proceeded as it always does: Messi won. Salah placed seventh, a slight both inexplicable and expected. Salah spent the evening in Monaco, where he was due to receive the Golden Foot, football’s equivalent of a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. But Liverpool had a game the next day, so he left early and got on a plane home. Magy accepted the award for him.

He says that individual awards no longer motivate him. “I’m not really bothered by that.” That doesn’t mean he isn’t still determined to become the world’s best player: He is. Spending time with Salah, it’s clear that he has reconfigured his entire life around that singular goal. “If you asked me if this was a drive for me to be here? Yeah, of course. I can’t really lie and say honestly I don’t think about it. No, I think about it. I want to be the best player in the world. But I will have a good life even if I don’t win [the Ballon d’Or]. My life is okay; everything is fine.” He looks out the window of the town hall, hands in his pockets, shrugs. “Sometimes I feel it’s just politics.”

He still has other ambitions. “I want to qualify for the World Cup again, I want to win the African Cup [of Nations],” he says. In January, Salah plans to lead his country out onto the field in 2021’s AFCON tournament in Cameroon. Egypt is among the favourites, largely because of Salah.

He wants to be a good father. Makka and Kayan are settled in England; Makka already speaks English in a Scouse accent. Occasionally he posts pictures of them together: kicking a ball in the yard, teaching Makka chess, the two of them dressing up as Disney characters. “She is really competitive,” he says, laughing. “She tells me, ‘By the way, I am more famous than you, because when we go out people want to take a picture with me.’ ” To his kids, Salah’s fame is normal, the baseline. I was in Salah’s box during Liverpool’s 4-0 home win over Arsenal, and the kids weren’t even watching the game: Makka went off to play in the kids’ area and Kayan sat in a high chair, throwing fruit around and giggling joyously, while 50,000 fans sang their father’s name.

There is a popular idea that Chelsea made a mistake in selling Salah, and that he deserved a better chance to prove himself. (He wasn’t the only one. Manchester City’s Kevin De Bruyne, a strong contender for the world’s best midfielder, is also a Chelsea reject.) This version of events, however, misses the point: Getting benched turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to him. “When you feel that your dream is slipping away, you want to do everything to get it,” Salah says. “I don’t want to be a victim. I don’t want to be like, ‘He went to Chelsea and because he is Arab or something, they didn’t give him a chance.’ I don’t care about that. Whatever it takes to succeed, I will do it.”

Perhaps that’s why the episodes with the thief and the homeless person resonated so much with people: Everyone deserves a do-over. There’s something comforting in the idea that we can all unlock the potential that exists inside of us, even when others don’t see it. That all that stands between us and outrageous fortune is hard work. “People are always happy with where they are. People have their routine or their comfort zone or whatever they want to call it. They don’t like to change. That’s who we are as humans,” Salah says. “People suffer for years because they don’t want to change. But for me, like: No. I needed to change.”

If that sounds like the kind of pop philosophy you’ll find in any self-help book, that’s because it is. But how many of us read those books on the secrets of success and actually follow through? Who spends nine hours on a bus, just to play football? Salah did. He spent those hours dreaming of this moment, and now that it has arrived, he’s going to savour it for all it’s worth.

“I sacrificed everything I could just to be sitting here, now,” he says. “I gave everything. All my life was just for football.” He smiles that big smile, and the sun pours in through the window, and maybe it’s the chandeliers or the golden room we’re in, but it’s like he’s glowing.

He needs to get to training. Even now, he likes to be there early and last to leave. Salah says his goodbyes to the film crew and heads out into the street, where he climbs into the back of a plush BMW sent just for him. Several passersby do a double-take, like, *Was that—*? But it’s too late, he’s already gone. ⌘

OLIVER FRANKLIN-WALLIS *is a journalist based in England.*

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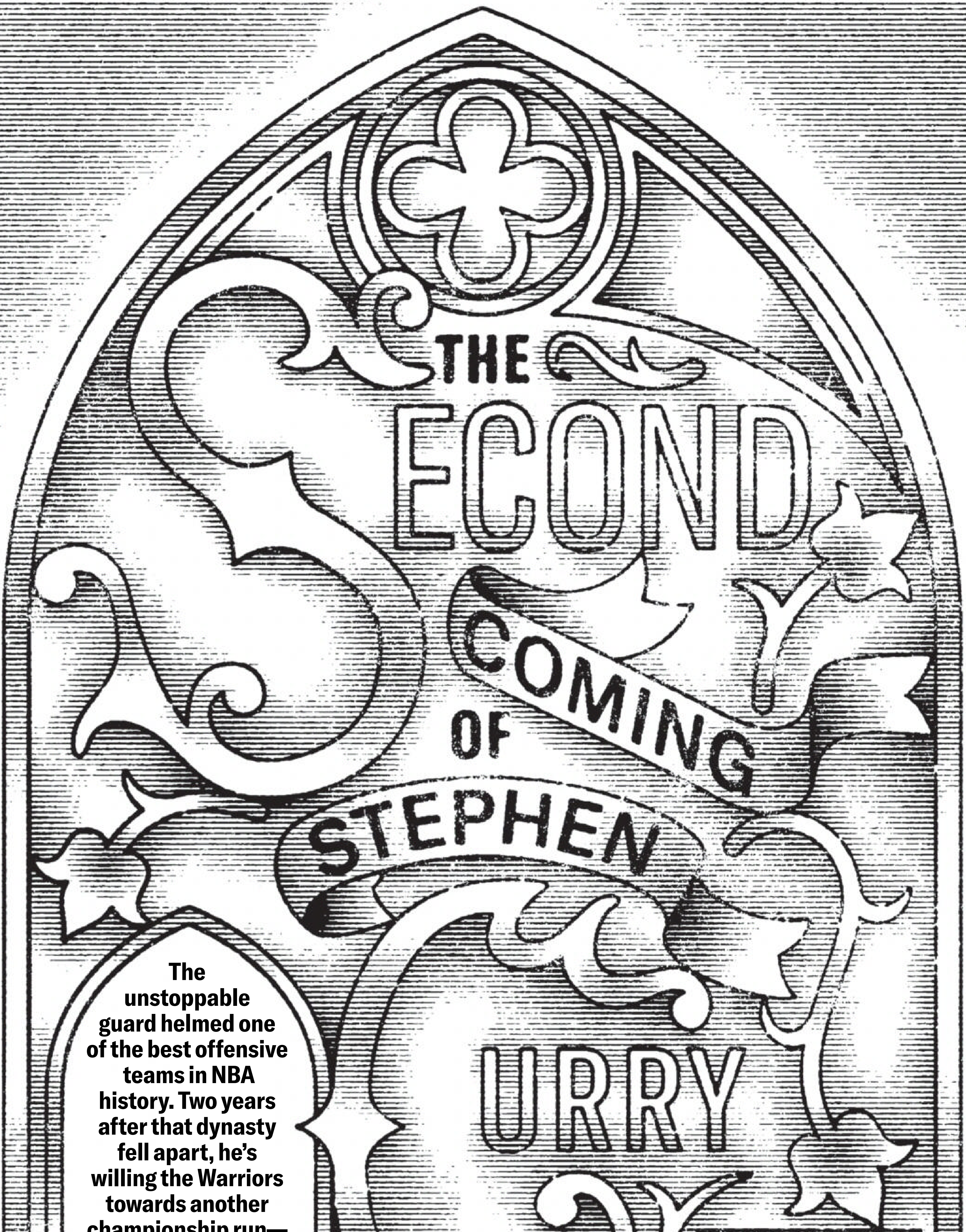
Tank top by **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello**

Pants by **Maryam Nassir Zadeh**

Grooming by Larry King at A-Frame Agency using Larry King Haircare. Tailoring by Michelle Warner. Set design by Sean Thomson @ The Magnet Agency. Produced by North Six Europe. Photographed at Holland Hall.



THE SECOND COMING OF STEPHEN CURRY

The unstoppable guard helmed one of the best offensive teams in NBA history. Two years after that dynasty fell apart, he's willing the Warriors towards another championship run—and underlining his claim as one of the game's all-time greats.

BY HANIF ABDURRAQIB
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SHANIQWA JARVIS
STYLED BY MOBOLAJI DAWODU

THE CALM THAT hovers over the streets around the Chase Center in San Francisco late on a night when no basketball is being played is intoxicating. That is, until you walk inside. That same calm gives way to an eeriness—the space is cavernous and labyrinthian, hallways collapsing into hallways. A corner light flickers in a series of hiccups. Music echoes from some undetermined distance. Following the sounds, I'm led to a kind of makeshift subterranean gym. Laughter rises from a group of handlers, circled around Stephen Curry, who's dressed as if he's just finished a workout. At his feet rest two 30-pound barbells branded with the Golden State Warriors logo. A Warriors towel rests on his head. Drake's *Certified Lover Boy* ricochets off the walls.

It's here, in the belly of the Warriors' arena, that Stephen Curry has diligently remade himself and his team. And glimpsing him in this private lair, just before our interview, is like witnessing a superhero's origin story. Except it's the sequel, the story of his rebirth. Our hero is better than before, the mythology more grandiose. In an instant, there's a song shift. Once the beat drops on "You Only Live Twice", Curry is newly energized, grinning underneath the shadow of the towel, gesturing with his hands, shaking his head on beat. The song serves as an appropriate anthem for a player in the throes of a second NBA life, making the impossible look easy in new ways.

The first era of the modern Warriors dynasty was staggering: three championships and five straight finals. The 73-win season. Curry breaking the single-season three-point record, then breaking it again (and again). Then things began to crumble. There's an enduring image from late in the third quarter of the 2019 NBA finals. The Warriors are down to the Raptors in the series, 3-2. But in the game itself, they're up by three. Kevin Durant had gone out with an injury the game prior, and there is Klay Thompson, barely able to walk, being carried off the court with what later would be diagnosed as a torn ACL. A replay showed Curry slamming the ball in frustration, a rare crack in his usually placid demeanour. It seemed that he came to a realization in that moment. He was the only star left, fighting back against the inevitable depletion of his team. And he was. The Warriors lost the finals. Durant was off to Brooklyn in the off season. The pandemic threw the league off course. Thompson tore an Achilles before he even returned from the ACL injury. Curry injured his hand. There were those who said it was a good run. We got a half-decade of greatness. No dynasty can last forever.

Yet there's something remarkable brewing in the Bay once again. The night before, there *was* an NBA game here. The Raptors came to town and left with their 15th loss out of the last 17 games they've played on Golden State's home floor. Curry didn't have the kind of game spectators have been accustomed to seeing him put together this season—he managed just 12 points on 2-10 shooting—but the Warriors still won, relatively comfortably. This was a departure from last season, when at times it felt like in order for the Warriors to be in a game, Curry had to maintain an almost unsustainable level. *Almost* unsustainable because, through the season, he somehow managed to sustain it. Those heroics were both miraculous and a bit concerning. It felt, at times, like one last flourish before the flame burned out entirely. Curry, dragging what some considered to be a fading team along, unconcerned with the toll it might be taking on his body.

But this is a new era of Warriors basketball. As of now, Curry and the Warriors have the best record in the NBA, and they've made it look both easy and fun. A youthful energy has been infused into the core of reliable stars. Young players like Jordan Poole have taken leaps. Still-youthful semi-vets like Andrew Wiggins have further solidified roles as effective two-way options. Draymond Green is back in his Defensive Player of the Year form, even more cerebral than he was before. Stephen Curry's job, so far, has been considerably easier.

In a green room inside the arena, Curry settles into a chair. He's older now, 33, but doesn't look worn down. There's still a childlike quality to him; he's a thoughtful speaker, and there's often a grin creeping along the edges of his mouth, like he's just heard a secret. He's also stronger than he was, no longer the young player with a jersey sliding off his shoulders in his Davidson years or his first few seasons in the NBA. The muscles in his arms cut a clear outline through his black hoodie as he puts a hand on his face to ponder a question. He holds this pose for several seconds after I ask him about dynasties, and the challenges of reshaping a team for another run, after over a decade in the league and just two seasons after it seemed like the torch was being passed.

"Well, as many good breaks as we got, we got kind of the same bad breaks," he begins. "The injuries that took us to a pretty crazy free fall right before the pandemic. And it's weird because if you look at it in those two years, it was tough to be patient and tough for me, just staying locked in and motivated."

He pauses briefly, before running towards a closing thought: "And for us, that's been the mental [block we've had to] unlock—staying sharp, staying fresh, and appreciating the climb to hopefully get back to the top, and personally, I've just been riding that wave. Understand if you're in this league long enough, hopefully you'll experience many different things, many different

←←
PREVIOUS PAGE
Coat, hoodie, pants, and shoes by **Fear of God**

Ring (on left hand, throughout), his own

Ring (on right hand, throughout) by **Established**

→
Jacket by **Homme Plissé Issey Miyake**

Sweater by **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello**

Pants by **Dunhill**

Watch by **Hublot**

narratives, and you have to not reinvent your game, but just reinvent your focus on what the challenge ahead of you each year is. And I feel like that's been really a shock to the system these last two years."

The place the team finds itself in suits Curry. To have his squad written off, only to bring them roaring back as a newer, potentially better version of their old selves. It all fits the overarching Curry mythology—that of the perpetual underdog. It's significantly more difficult to sell that narrative now than it was when Curry was a scrawny kid firing away at Davidson, stitching together an upset run to the Elite Eight. More difficult than when he was battling ankle injuries early in his NBA career. Indeed, the idea of the underdog today seems almost an invention, just as Michael Jordan imagined slights and pulled foes out of thin air. Curry smirks a bit when I ask, incredulously, about his commitment to this underdog status. "I've failed at explaining what it feels like," he says. "But I still carry that one thousand percent, because I have a long-term memory of everything that it took and everything I've been through to get here."

CURRY'S COACH AT Davidson, Bob McKillop, is one of the few people who can remember when Curry truly was an underdog. He was a three-star recruit who was all but ignored by Division I colleges, most notably Virginia Tech—alma mater of his NBA-famous father, Dell, and the school Curry had eyed for himself. Davidson was one of the only schools to offer Curry a scholarship, a choice the programme made because of his resiliency, McKillop says. "We went to see him play in Vegas in an AAU tournament the summer before his senior year," McKillop tells me. "He played in one of the auxiliary gyms, not the main gym. There were very few people at the game, and even fewer coaches. I felt pretty good knowing that only a couple of guys were watching him." McKillop waits a beat before the reveal. "And he was awful. He threw the ball into the stands, he dropped passes, he dribbled off his foot, he missed shots. But never once during that game did he blame an official, or point a finger at a teammate. He was always cheering from the bench, he looked in his coach's eyes, and he never flinched. That stuck with me."

McKillop is talking, in part, about the intangibles that Curry has always had. But there are parts of his game he's reinvented, too, just as anyone does who plays long enough and is committed to playing longer. Curry still refers to himself as a "late bloomer", and when he does, he's speaking of both then and now—a game that is still evolving. The beauty that has always been present in his game still remains. Not just the shots themselves, the miracle heaves over a forest of arms, or the wide-open effortless flicks that look good even while still ascending. But also the beauty in Curry's movement. His is a game predicated on a series of small escapes, running through slivers of space in hopes of finding some larger sliver of space on the other end. All of those things are hallmarks of a beautiful game. But there's also a renewed physicality to what Curry does on the court, a renewed commitment to defence—something that haunted his play in the earlier parts of his career.

Curry tells me that there's a potential delusion he's in the throes of: the belief that he can still get better, even though he knows there's a point where he'll say that but won't actually feel it. He's not there yet, though, he claims. "There's a level of insecurity that comes with my personal experience of how I get ready for a season," Curry reveals. "I understand where the bar is at and I've got to keep raising it. So that level of insecurity drives me, because it's three months where you're thinking: *how do you get better?*"

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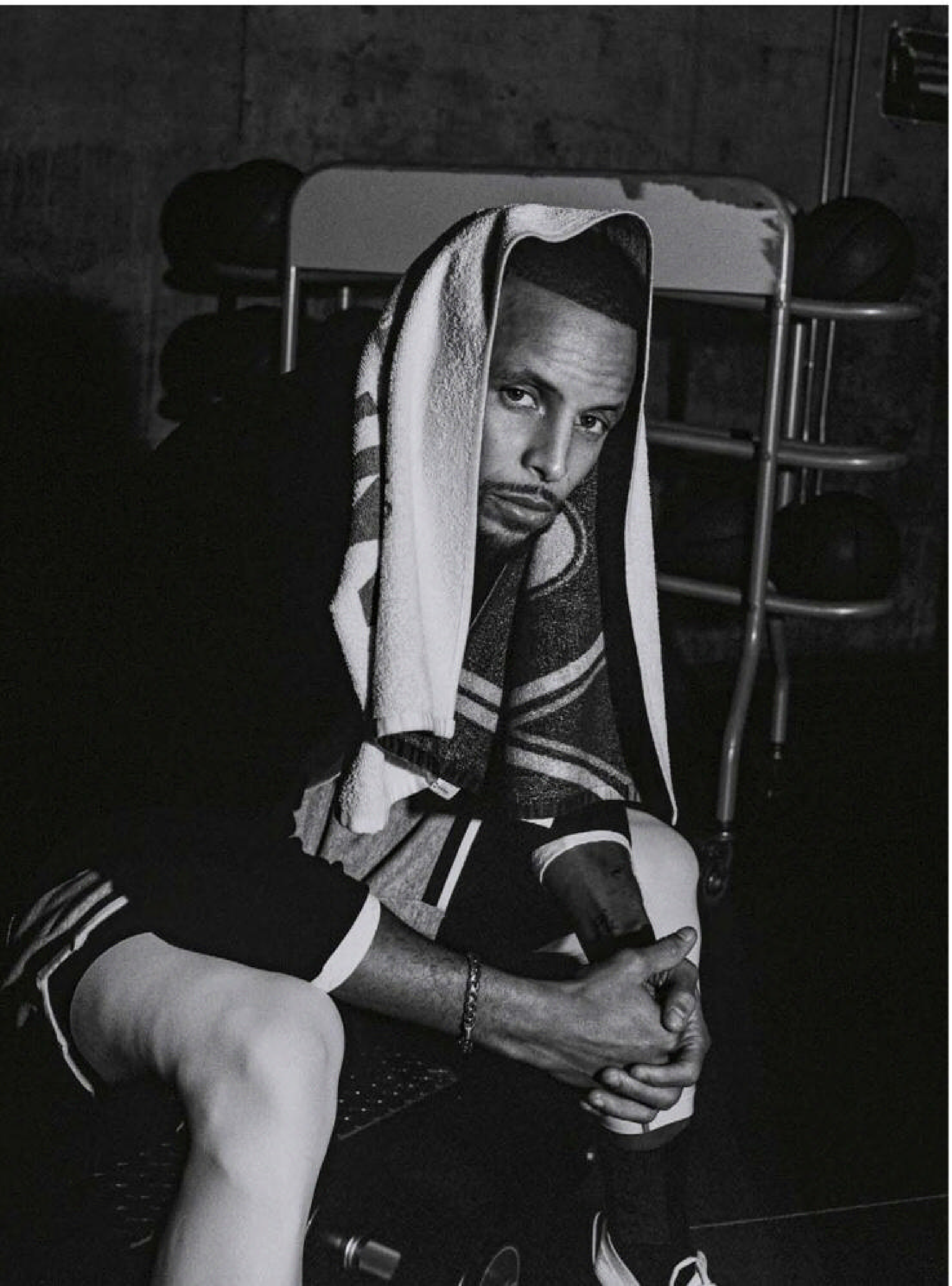
Watch by
Vacheron Constantin

In the words of his current coach, Steve Kerr, much of Curry's constant evolution revolves around how he has taken care of his body and improved it. He's still gaining muscle—he reportedly added five pounds (2.3 kilograms) over the off season—as well as refining his power, his speed, and his quickness. That more muscular frame, Kerr says, has changed Curry's ability to be dangerous from everywhere. "From when I arrived here seven years ago, there's been a huge difference," Kerr tells me over the phone. "He's built his body in a way that impacts how he can finish at the rim, how he can get into the paint, and get through screens. And it's also helped him on defence. He's an excellent defender. This stigma has remained from early in his career that he's a weak defender, and I would just ask anyone to watch him night to night." This bears out statistically. At the time of this writing, Curry is in the midst of the greatest defensive season he's ever had, posting his highest defensive rating since he's entered the league (97.8) and also averaging a career-high 5.6 rebounds per game.

Despite being one of the game's greatest superstars, Curry remains something of an outlier in today's NBA, situated largely outside the fraternity of stars that operate with a public off-court kinship. That's partly due to the aforementioned underdog status that defined his youth and college career. He didn't play on the high-profile AAU teams or build the kind of relationships and rivalries that can define players before they even enter the league. This hasn't prevented Curry from forming certain narratives with his competitors, of course. His prolonged contest with LeBron James is now one of the great sports duels of our era, one that added yet another chapter late last season, when James hit a three-pointer over Curry's outstretched arms in the dwindling moments of the play-in game that would send the Lakers into the playoffs.

Curry looks upon the James rivalry almost with a sense of wonder, sometimes reminiscing about the early stages of their relationship. During the 2008 NCAA Tournament, it was James, then in his fifth season with the Cavs, who took a pilgrimage to Detroit to see Curry play in person. "I was a sophomore in college and LeBron was coming to my games!" Curry says with a sense of lingering disbelief. "I actually still have the jersey he gave me. He signed a jersey for me. I think that was November of my junior year. On my wall at my parents' house in Charlotte, it's still there. And he wrote it to me, called me the king of basketball in North Carolina. So I guess it's like the corny idols-become-rivals thing." He pauses here, almost as if he's stepping outside of the cloud of whimsy and nostalgia, and back into the reality of their competitive push-and-pull, the tensions that have waxed and waned throughout their clashes. He shrugs, matter-of-factly. "But it's real, though."



CURRY COUNTS CHRIS PAUL as a mentor, too, but is largely ambivalent about socializing with anyone except his teammates, "my guys", as he calls them—players he has spent the majority of his career around, building the culture of a single franchise. Which leads to another example of Curry's uniqueness in today's NBA. The player who stays on one team for his entire career has begun to feel like a relic, given how many players hop from team to team pursuing championships, or simply become late-career journeymen, playing their final, largely ineffective years in unfamiliar confines. There are certainly those who would rather forget Patrick Ewing wandering through his final two seasons, with Seattle and then Orlando. Hakeem Olajuwon winding down with Toronto. Curry has signed on for four more years with the Warriors, which would take him to age 38. In theory, he could go the route of Ewing or Olajuwon, but it seems unlikely. He's embedded himself in the community here. "When I got drafted to Golden State, my grandma had no idea what city it was in," Curry says with a laugh. "Everyone on the East Coast thinks L.A. is all of California."

Upon his arrival, Curry instantly fell in love with the team, the Bay, its fans. Contrary to the belief that *every* Golden State Warriors fan arrived just in time to bask in the heyday of the team's championship era, there was a long-suffering but devoted legion that slogged their way through the team's lean years, which stretched right up until Curry first showed up in town. The team built a consistent core of players through the draft, while also

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building a culture of basketball that was both winning *and* thrilling. But there have been changes. Most notably, there was the transplanting of the team from Oakland back to San Francisco, which Curry admits has been a bit of a challenge. He loved Oakland, he says. The team's identity was anchored there. "It feels a little bit like I got traded, but within the same organization," he tells me. He and the team are trying to build a new legacy, a sort of Warriors 2.0 in San Francisco. Yet another opportunity for a second life.

The team's location in the Bay has provided some opportunities for Curry to build a life away from basketball. He's used his company SC30 Inc. to invest in tech start-ups like the travel platform Snaptravel. This entry into tech, he says, was first orchestrated by Andre Iguodala, during his first run with the Warriors. "When he came from Denver in 2013, he came with passion behind it and some connections and he started to pique everybody's interest," Curry says. "Our conversations in the locker room started to change drastically from rap albums and cars and all that type of stuff to like: You see that company's IPO? And then obviously the awareness of and exposure to what's in our backyard, Silicon Valley—he was the first that really opened my eyes to what was possible in that arena."

Now Curry has his own media company, Unanimous, which, among other things, is responsible for producing the miniature-golf show *Holey Moley*. "There's so much opportunity [in Hollywood] because doors are open," he says. "There's so much talent that can step into those rooms and deserve to be there, stay there, and have successful careers. And you can't really quantify it right now, but you can obviously have those checkpoints like, 'Are we making a true impact?' And, 'How is that going to weave into everything that I do?'"

To make a more tangible and immediate impact, in 2019 Curry launched a nonprofit called Eat. Learn. Play. with his wife, Ayesha, focusing on childhood nutrition, education, and physical activity. In March 2021, the organization delivered meals to 24,000 students and their families to make up for the meals those students would no longer be getting at school due to pandemic limitations. Elsewhere in Curry's universe, SC30 Inc. has been responsible for launching Howard University's men's and women's golf programmes, and his Curry Brand has poured funds into Harlem's famous Rucker Park, investing in programmes to support young basketball players in the area with clinics and equipment.

➔
Jacket and pants by **Brunello Cucinelli**
Vest by **Mr. Saturday**
Sunglasses by **Billy Reid x Krewe**

Hair by Yusef Wright. Skin by Hee Soo Kwon using Dior Backstage Face & Body Foundation. Tailoring by Yelena Travkina. Set design by Dylan Lynch. Produced by North Six. Photographed at Chase Center, home of the Golden State Warriors.

"Having someone of Stephen's stature take you under his wings pays huge dividends."

—JORDAN POOLE

There is a thread that runs through all of this: an obsession with uplifting the underdog, or the underrepresented, or—a word Curry often uses—the "underrated".

As we talk, it becomes clear that that idea is part of his DNA. His book club, which carries the Underrated moniker, highlights books about protagonists overcoming personal struggles or ones by authors he feels have been overlooked in their own right. Cole Brown's *Greyboy*, about navigating the sometimes tricky boundaries between race and class, was one such book club pick; Brown is also working with Unanimous on bringing other projects to the screen. Curry lights up again when talking about his Underrated Tour, which travels the country offering a platform to three-star high-school basketball prospects. The players who might, for example, play in an auxiliary gym during the big AAU tournaments. The players who might have only one or two coaches locked in on them. ("When I was a sophomore, junior, in high school, I wouldn't even have been invited to my own camp," he says, shaking his head.)

When Curry's aims and investments are all laid out, they can seem a bit like a sneaker commercial, spoken over some swelling instrumental. Which might be more beautiful than inspirational on its face. But his ambitions only come to life through the connective tissue that binds them together. None of it is promising that the *next* Stephen Curry will be unearthed through a camp, or through a kid having access to a meal or a court to play on. But these initiatives *are* all asking the question of what might happen if enough openings were offered. What might happen if enough young people ran through one space to get to a larger, more rewarding space. Yet another manifestation of Curry's game.

After I ask about how the responsibilities of star athletes have evolved through the decades, he brings up his father. "I had a front-row seat to watch my dad go through it for 16 years," Curry tells me. Dell Curry played the most prominent parts of his career in Charlotte, and in the late '90s he started a foundation that built computer-learning centres in neglected neighbourhoods. And just as Stephen was courtside at games, he was also required to be hands-on in the off-court aspects of his father's career. "Me and my siblings used to go volunteer and spend a lot of time in those centres," he says. "And I got to see what happens when a community is galvanized, gets fundraising, gets places for kids to go spend time and develop themselves and invest themselves. I saw it on that level. And unless you saw it up close, in person, you didn't really hear about it."

Curry is considering the shift in platform and ability to spread the good word. There was less than a decade between Dell's retirement (2002) and Stephen's entry into the league (2009), but in that small window, technology changed. The potential for exposure grew, and with it players' profiles soared. In turn, they gained more leverage, in part leading to the modern era of renewed player empowerment. "I'm still in the process of building and trying and doing," he says. "Not to sound too noble, but I really respect and appreciate what's happened in my life in terms of what basketball has provided me and my family. Opportunities I never thought would be possible. And it hasn't always been perfect in terms of how I've tried to start things. And there's been a lot of different transitions through a lot of phases of the early days of doing this and taking ownership of it. But, I know it's going to be worth it."

THE GOLDEN STATE Warriors currently find themselves in a unique transitional phase: The team is getting older and younger at the same time. With Curry and Thompson and Iguodala and Green all now in their 30s, they've furnished the next generation of their roster with players like Poole, James Wiseman, Jonathan Kuminga, and Moses Moody. They aren't in rebuild mode, and their best players still seem to have a lot left in the tank, but they are mindful of continuity and how to remain in contention when the sun sets on the careers of their core players. With this in mind, Kerr highlights Curry's shift in leadership. "Well, he's never been a yell-and-scream type of guy," Kerr says. "He likes pulling guys aside and giving advice quietly. But now, he's much more likely to speak up in front of the team than he was five years ago. He's one of the oldest guys on the team, and he recognizes the responsibility that comes with that."

Curry is something of a master of team dynamics, having had to grow into a leader with little in the way of a road map. When he came to Golden State, there were veterans, but there wasn't a winning culture. Curry, Green, and Thompson had to figure out their own leadership styles, but also how to pass down what they learned when the time came. And that time is now. The team is pursuing another title while its best players simultaneously cling to their prime and condition their young and talented teammates to keep up. It's an alarming balance, one that might be easier if Golden State's centrepieces were in the twilight of their careers, playing through farewell tours.

When Curry considers the construction of the team and his current responsibilities within the Warriors ecosystem, he grins. "Well, it's also weird because when we won our first championship, in 2015, Jordan Poole was 15 years old," he says. "Jonathan Kuminga and Moses Moody were like freshmen in high school, and now they're here. It's weird to think they were watching us like we were almost basketball gods." He laughs, and then offers an accepting shrug. "And now they're here helping us do it again."

This specific nostalgia rings true for Jordan Poole, who summons a specific memory of Curry's greatness: his infamous game-winning pull-up three against Oklahoma City in 2016. "I grew up in Milwaukee, so I was mostly getting Eastern Conference games on television," Poole says. "That was the rare night I got a Western Conference game, and it didn't disappoint."

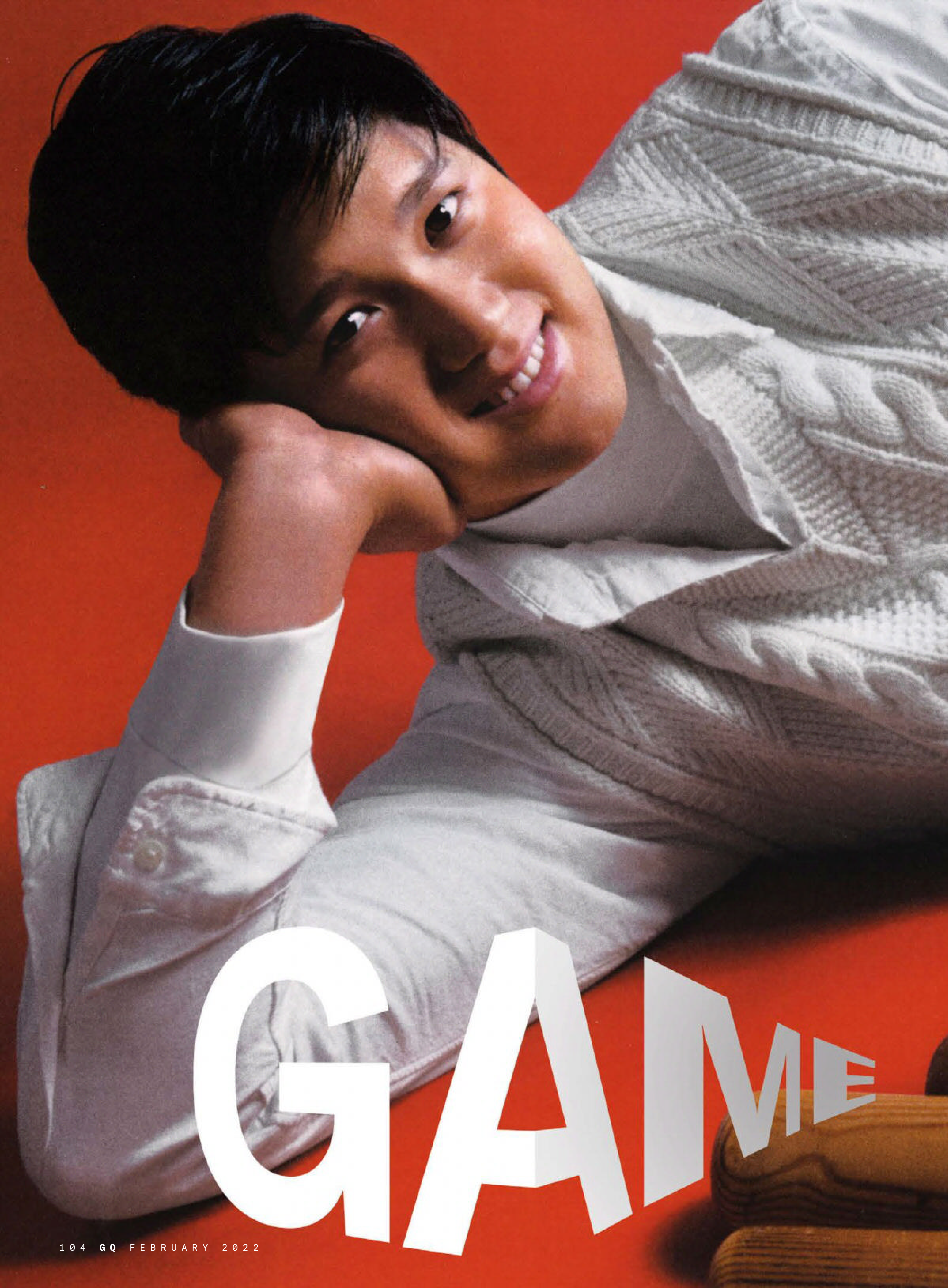
For Poole, the transition from spectator to participant has been surreal. Curry, Thompson, Green, and Iguodala were all part of "a world-changing dynasty", he says—one that he's now fighting to keep alive. And he's doing so by looking to Curry's leadership. "Having someone of his stature take you under his wings, someone who has so much experience on the court and so much knowledge in life, pays huge dividends," he says. "He opened my eyes so much to the game of basketball. He does a great job of demonstrating patience with the team, especially the young guys."

Curry, for his part, dreams of a future five years from now where Poole is an all-star, Kuminga is an all-defensive player, and Wiseman is an MVP candidate. He and Green will be fulfilled then, he says.

But there is still the business of winning games, of building a legacy, of conquering doubters, real and invented. There are still those who insist that Curry has ruined the game—that he's inspired a trend towards outrageously long-range threes that should only be attempted by a generational talent. These cries might seem unique to someone too young to remember those who insisted that Steve Nash was ruining the game, or that Allen Iverson was ruining the game before him, and so on. The miracle in all of these players, for me and for a lot of short, small kids I've known, is that they were operating in a game not entirely built for them and yet extracting all the magic they could from it. Sure, Curry is bigger now than he once was, but he's still a fairly small guard who has perfected his ability to not only play well, but play with flair. To both wow and frustrate opponents, as Nash and Iverson did.

And there are kids somewhere shooting 35-foot shots before even attempting to perfect the mid range, and kids pulling off dribble moves with their heads down, completely missing open teammates. But there's something else that hovers in my mind as I exit the arena. We've had Stephen Curry for a good, long, thrilling time, and we're not going to have him forever. Even if he plays out his latest extension, four seasons can come and go in an instant. And so, with any luck, there are also some kids out there, short and scrawny, watching the blueprint Stephen Curry is mapping out in real time: How to dominate what isn't meant for you, until it is meant for you alone. ■

HANIF ABDURRAQIB *is the author of* A Little Devil in America: Notes in Praise of Black Performance *and the recipient of a 2021 MacArthur Foundation grant.*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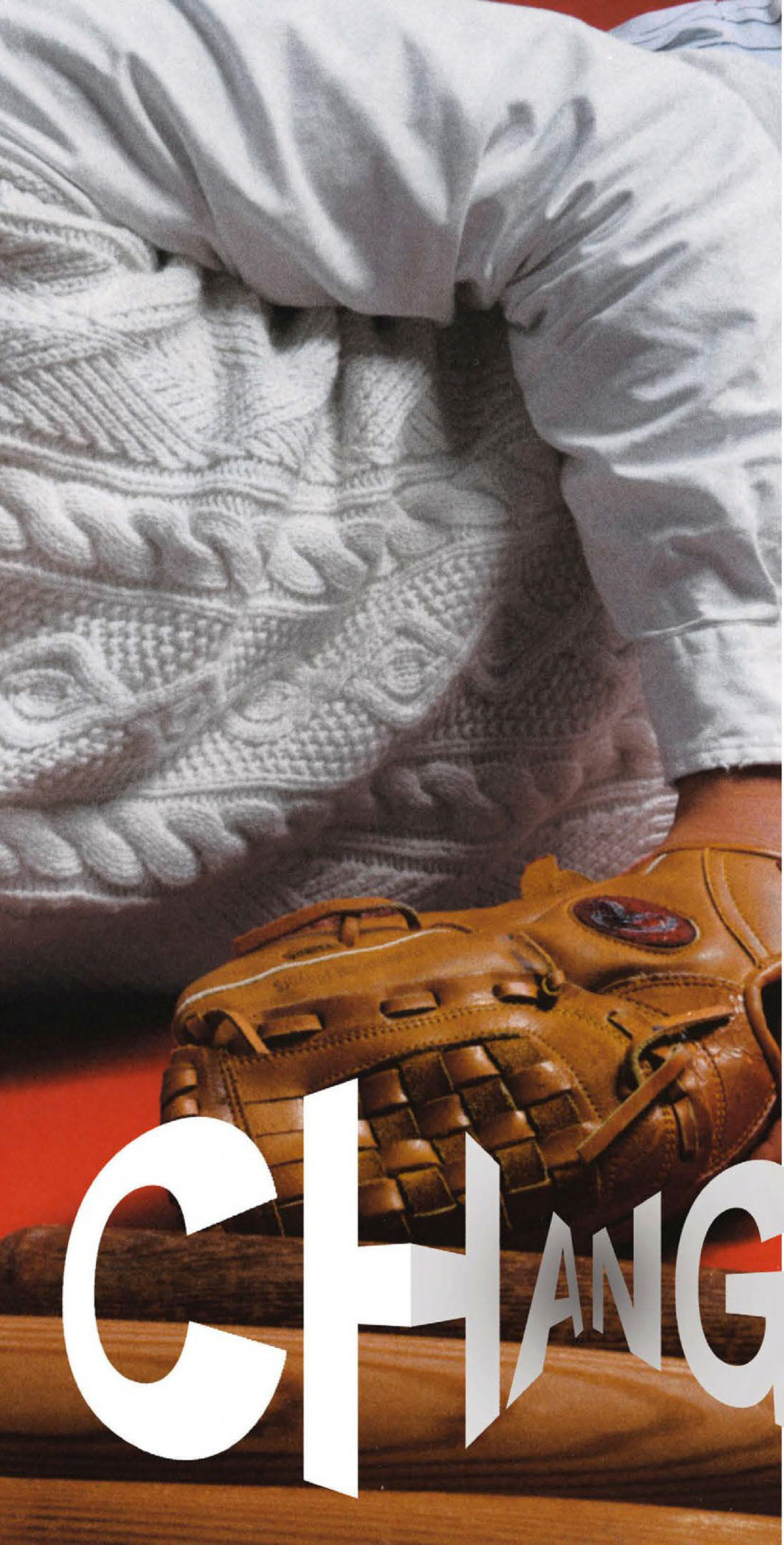


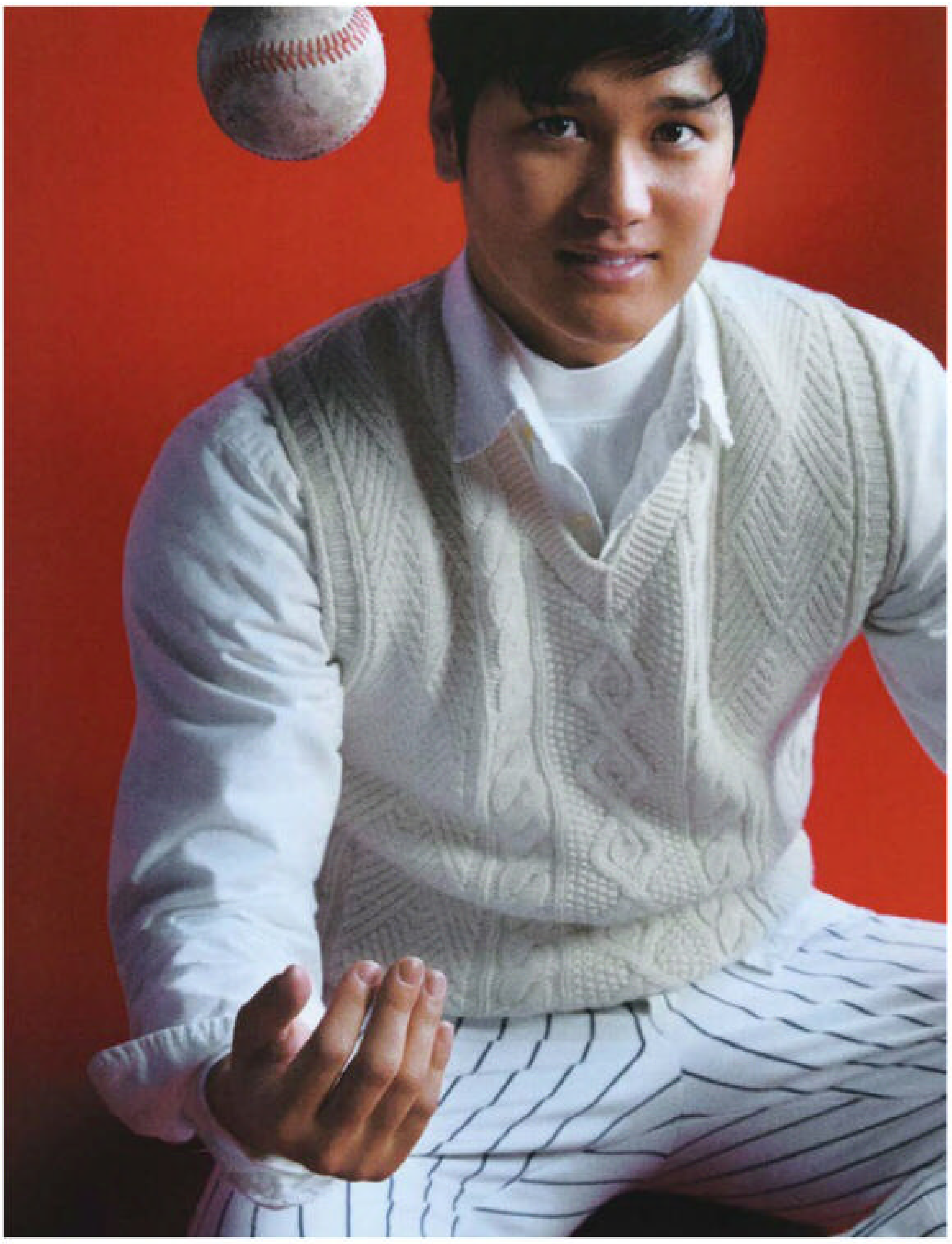
CHANGER

Once in a while an athlete comes along who forces us to rethink everything. Like Shohei Ohtani, the two-way sensation who is one of baseball's best pitchers and one of the game's best hitters. He reminds us what baseball used to be—and shows us what it might somehow become.

BY DANIEL RILEY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ELI RUSSELL LINNETZ
STYLED BY JON TIETZ

IT BEGINS AT once. In the very first inning of his very first start last season, Shohei Ohtani does the thing that now distinguishes him among, frankly, all baseball players ever. In the top half of the inning, Ohtani-the-pitcher eases his way into 2021 with a few 100-plus mph (160-plus kph) fastballs and three quick outs. Then, in the bottom half, Ohtani-the-hitter launches the first pitch he sees 451 feet into the right field bleachers, becoming the first starting pitcher to homer in an American League (AL) game since 1972. In just half an hour, then, the full breadth of the spectacle of Major League Baseball's first pitching-and-hitting two-way phenom since Babe Ruth.

The Los Angeles Angels superstar grows more dominant on the mound all summer, supported in part by the offense that he himself generates. As a result, he becomes the first player in baseball history to appear in the All-Star game as both a starting pitcher and a lead-off hitter. In his home country of Japan, where he was born, raised, and revered before he jumped to the MLB four years ago, the public broadcasting network, NHK, televises all of his games, employing in some broadcasts a special Ohtani cam that holds on him at all times, allowing viewers to track his every home run, head scratch, and cup adjustment. A 7 p.m. East Coast road game starts at 9 a.m. in Japan. A 7 p.m. L.A. home game starts at noon. Daily Shohei from halfway around the world, so ubiquitous it's like the weather. What we are witnessing during the Summer of Shohei is Ohtani becoming one of the rarest things in sports: an athlete who is capable, in any given crack of the bat or duck-diving splitter, of producing something no one has seen with their own eyes before. It feels so natural to watch the biggest and most talented kid on the field doing everything well that it only underscores how rare it is for a pitcher-slugger to ascend to the highest level of baseball. How improbable it is to excel at one baseball thing—let alone the two most highly valued skills in the game: surgical power pitching and fearsome power hitting. Shohei is, in this way, like LeBron bringing the ball up the court, shooting threes, dunking over defenders, and swatting lay-ups off the glass at the other end of the court. He is, in this way, like Lionel Messi weaving box to box with the ball at his feet, beating six or eight defenders, and practically dribbling across the opponent's goal line. That is, defying the prescribed limits of conventional positions, spacing, and skill so overwhelmingly that it makes us question whether the game's ideas about who should play where and in what capacity are wrong—have always been wrong.



When the Summer of Shohei ends in the fall, Ohtani is presented with a unanimous MVP award (rare) and the Commissioner's Historic Achievement Award (rarer still). He is one of the few things in America, then, that people can seem to agree on. But more than that, he is the surest sign in a generation that the game may have a player—and a whole new way of playing—to bring baseball back from the brink.

SHOHEI OHTANI IS IN the cushioned cockpit of a Duffy boat that's cruising the man-made waterways off Newport Beach, California. He is in all black—black Asics sneakers; black Hugo Boss sweatpants and sweatshirt; black Oakley sunglasses; and a black Hugo Boss hat, worn backward. Black that matches his matt-black all-electric Tesla Model X. Black that lengthens his broad and plenty long six-foot-four frame, a frame so perfectly, hybrid-ly engineered for pitching for power, hitting for power, and running for speed that Hall of Famer Chipper Jones called it "one of the best baseball bodies I've ever seen.... He's Adonis."

He is 27 years old and has a young lineless face, made younger by an indiscriminate grin and a high-pitched laugh. On the field, he makes clear that barrelling a baseball 500 feet or watching a batter whiff at one of his splitters is, in fact, more than any other emotion, *fun*. He often can't help but smile when he does something incredible. And occasionally apologizes to opponents, with genuine sheepish deference, when he does something so extraordinary that it surprises even himself. There are compilation videos of his countless baseball feats, but also of Shohei just picking up trash off the field and in the dugout, evidence to the fans who make the videos that he's "just a great human".

Shohei talks with English speakers primarily through his interpreter, Ippei Mizuhara, who is also his 24/7 right hand, and, on the boat today, at his left hand. There's a pattern to our exchanges. I say something, Shohei understands some, Ippei translates the rest. Shohei draws in a sharp inhalation as he considers questions with the full battery of his brain—then says something that makes Ippei chuckle. It's a warm game of telephone. He hasn't done something like this before, and it maybe feels novel to put one's lived life into (translated) words. I get the sense that he follows most of what I'm saying all afternoon, while my entirely untrained ears understand almost none of what he does, save the occasional *yakyū* (baseball) and *Ichiro-san*.

Shohei was from his earliest age what's known in Japan as a *yakyū shōnen*—a kid who eats, sleeps, and breathes baseball. He grew up in Ōshū, Iwate Prefecture, a region of rolling mountains and farmland. "Way out there," Shohei says. "Countryside. Middle of nowhere." The equivalent in Japan of growing up in the cornfields of the American Midwest. His dad played ball in the Japanese Industrial League—for the automotive plant where he and Shohei's mother worked—and coached Shohei's little league team. At the youth level, games in Japan begin with players removing their caps and bowing to their coach, their hosts, the fans, and then the field. (A tradition that adds context to those videos of Shohei clearing his cathedral of litter.) Shohei attended one of the top baseball high schools in the country and experienced his first real national attention as an 18-year-old when he was clocked on TV throwing a 100-mph fastball to another teenager who looks in the instant like he's just seen the future: his, not playing baseball; this kid on the mound, making it somewhere very far.

After flirting with jumping to America while still in his teens, Shohei signed with the Japanese pro league's Hokkaidō Nippon-Ham Fighters when they agreed to let him try playing both ways (something no team in Japan or the U.S. had been scouting him for at the time). During his five years with the Fighters, Shohei became the Nippon Professional Baseball (NPB) league's star. An MVP. A Japan Series champion. A future world beater. The Fighters are based in Sapporo, the capital of Japan's northernmost main island of Hokkaidō, where it is snowy, windswept, "harsh", Shohei says—in all times but the heart of baseball season a landscape shaped by arctic blasts across the Sea of Japan from Siberia. While living in the team dorms, he sent his salary home to his mother, who in turn put about a thousand dollars in his personal bank account each month that Shohei rarely touched. Despite the mounting fame in Japan, his was a life organized around the single-minded pursuit of a set of highly specific baseball goals. In high school, his coach asked him to create a document with objectives for each year. (E.g.: *Age 26: Win the World Series and get married. / Age 37: First son starts baseball. / Age 38: Stats drop; start to think about retirement.*) The lens, then, had been selected. The aperture was tight. Life was contained to the Sapporo dorms and the Sapporo Dome—and it was a life of glorious baseball monasticism.

When we arrived at the harbour in Newport Beach, Shohei took photos with his phone of some luxury yachts moored at the dock. There was wonder on his face, some innocent chuckles, as though encountering conspicuous displays of recreational wealth were still novel. The marina abutted Balboa Island, the Newport Beach–iest of Newport Beach, home to the banana stand that inspired *Arrested Development* and the waterfront lifestyle that inspired *The O.C.* There were USC flags hanging from every other balcony. There were Land Rovers and Mercedes and custom golf carts. There were streets named for precious gems. The sun was hot, the hills were burning, precipitation felt like a distant, dreamy memory. We were a long way from the enormous ice floe of Hokkaidō.

As Shohei boarded the Duffy boat, which belongs to Nez Balelo, Shohei's agent and our captain for the day, the top step dipped a nice plunking dip and the empty boat rolled. "Whoa!" Shohei exclaimed.

"Careful..." Balelo exhaled through his teeth before smiling. "Last thing we need is you slipping."

Shohei has played his first four seasons with the Angels on a series of contracts that have, much like the rookie-year contracts of some top players in the NBA, felt like an inexplicable steal. The word *rookie* as applied to Japanese stars who migrate to the majors has always been a misnomer. Hideo Nomo was 26 when he arrived. Ichiro Suzuki was 27. Hideki Matsui was 28. Yu Darvish was 25. They were multi-year All-Stars in Japan. MVPs in all cases. Shohei made the move at 23. But had he waited until he was 25, he would've been regarded as a free agent (i.e., free to be paid anything; i.e., free to be paid hundreds of millions of dollars). By jumping to the States when he did, though, there were complex restrictions in place by the MLB that basically made him available for pennies on the dollar, which meant every team in the majors could play along in the sweepstakes and make their pitch. Shohei ultimately chose the Angels for what he calls "a little connection... It was just a feeling more than anything else—the vibe, the connection."

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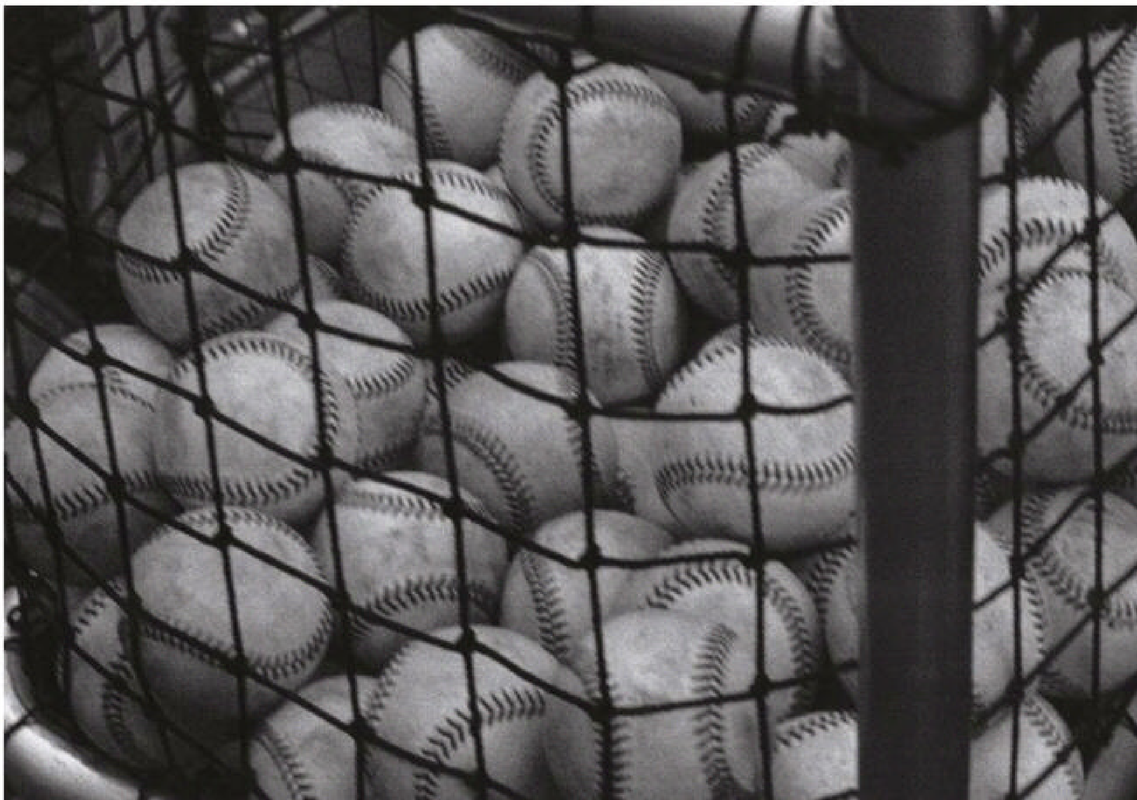
OPENING PAGES AND OPPOSITE PAGE

Vest and shirt by **Polo Ralph Lauren**

Mock turtleneck by **Lands' End**

Pants from **ABC Signature Costume**

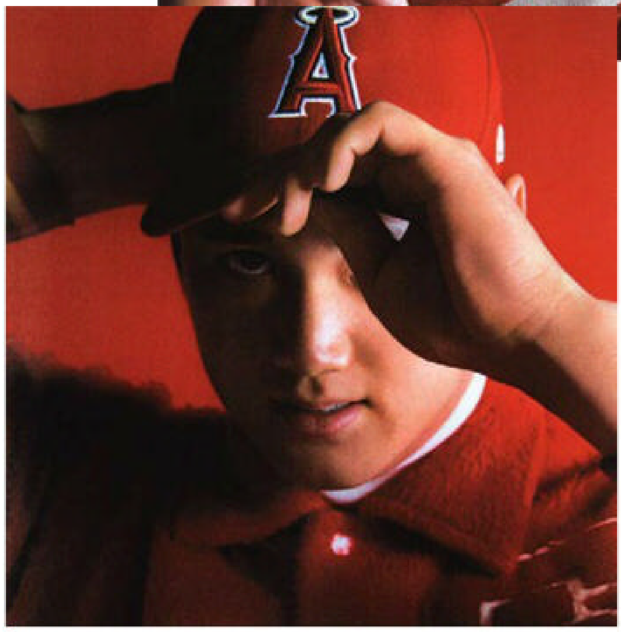


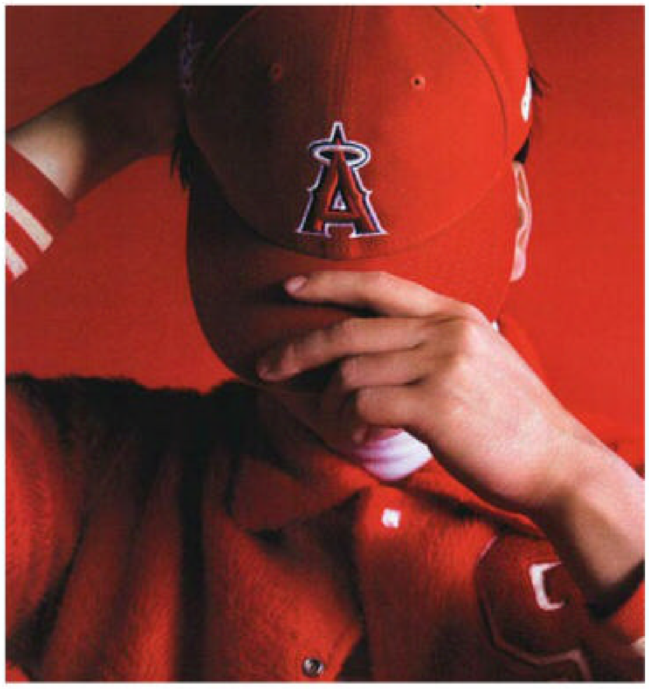
Shohei didn't really feel the palpable transition from one life to another on the plane ride to the U.S., he says, but rather when he first met his teammates at spring training in Arizona: "I felt like my lifelong dream was really starting up." The scene in Arizona was frenzied. Rare are the rookie prospects who are expected to immediately deliver on such sizzling hype. Shohei struggled at first, spiking balls from the mound, whiffing at Major League gas. The explanations were reasonable: He'd often been slow to start a season; the average pitcher in the MLB throws harder than the average pitcher in the NPB; the ball is literally different ("it just felt really slippery in my hand"); and he was adjusting to a move to a whole new country, new food, new electrical outlets. "I've never been homesick," he says. Not when he left his parents' house in high school, not when he moved into the dorms in Hokkaidō, not in Phoenix that first spring training, and not now. But he was struggling—and he felt a little lost.

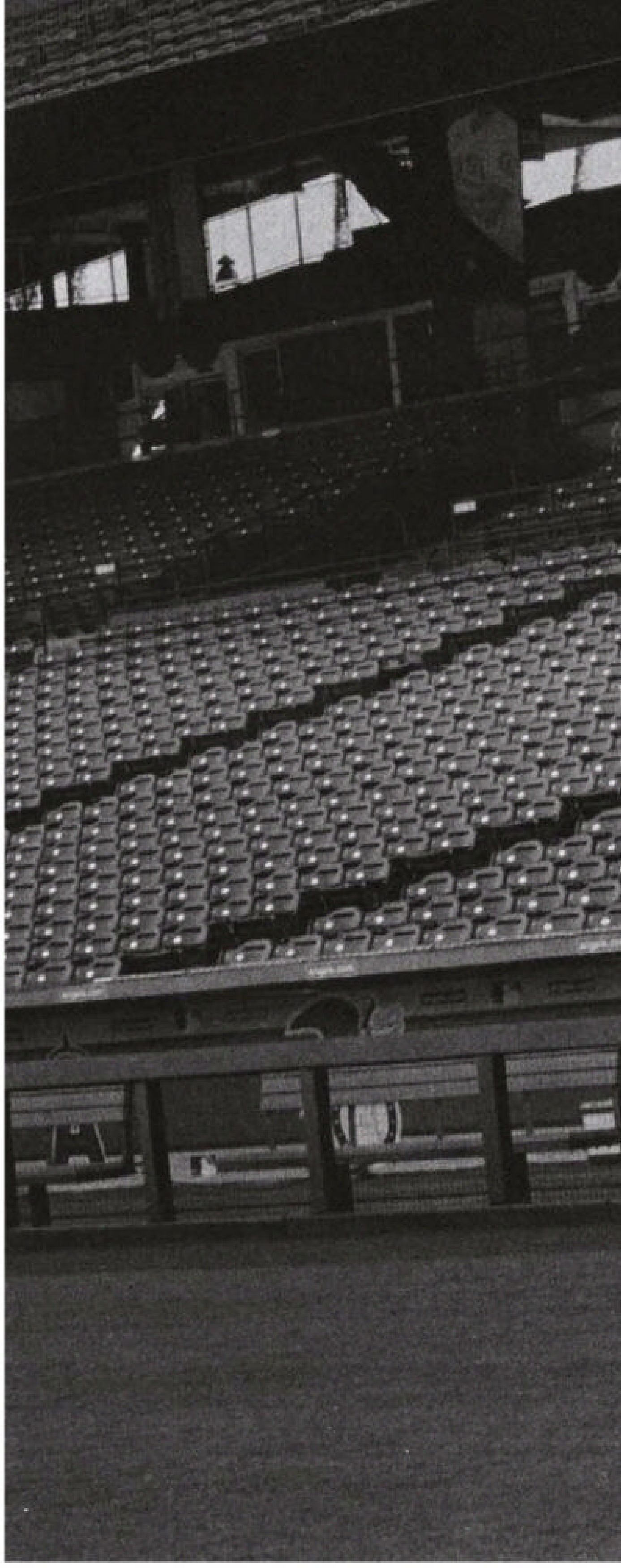
Which is when Ichiro Suzuki—the 10-time All-Star and one-time MVP, who at 44 was in Arizona for his second-to-last season with the Mariners—invited Shohei to dinner.

"Growing up," Shohei says, "Ichiro was for me the way that I think some kids, some people, look at me today. Like I'm a different species. Larger than life. He was a superstar in Japan. He had this charisma about him. But once I actually met him, and went to dinner with him, he was much closer to an average guy—which was kind of surprising."

At dinner that night, they talked about the transition to the league, the initial struggles of getting used to life in America: "But he basically told me: 'Remember to be yourself. You made it this far being yourself, so don't change that, stay within yourself.' And I kind of had to think about that. I'm the type of person who's always modifying a little bit, a little tweak in form here and there, always changing. Which kind of contradicts with what Ichiro was saying. But as I've really thought about it over the last few years, I've realized that that's me, that's who I am—actually changing stuff around." Shohei recognized that "being himself" meant always evolving. And it meant adhering to the instincts that had gotten him this far—that had made him the best player in Japan and had put him on the precipice of becoming the best in the world. "And so ever since that dinner with Ichiro, it kind of gave me the confidence to just be myself, to keep doing the right things, and to stay confident, to stay the course."







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All jerseys (throughout), his own

Turtleneck by **Boss**

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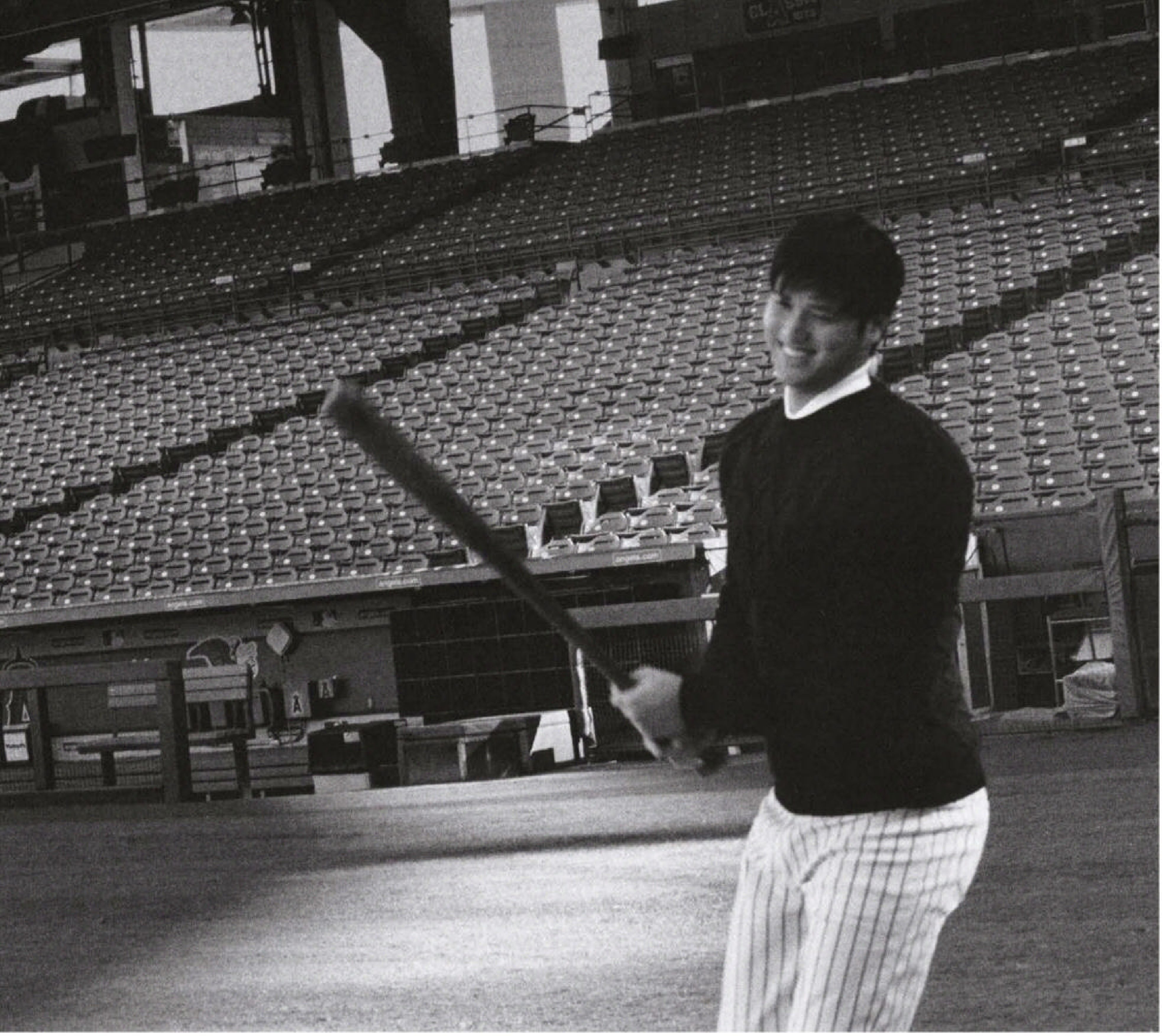
Jacket by **ERL**

All hats (throughout), his own

At one point on the boat, I ask Shohei how he'd be different if he'd jumped to the U.S. as an 18-year-old, right out of high school, instead of putting in those five years with the Fighters and developing further in Japan first. Back then, he says, everyone was just scouting him as a pitcher. No way would he have been playing two-way—pitching roughly once a week, and DHing most of the rest of the time, as he does now—or even been given the chance in the U.S. to try. "And to be honest, I don't even know if I would've made it at all," he says. "I would've had to go through the minor league system, and I can't really say one hundred percent that I would've been called up to the big leagues in the end." Instead: patience and evolution. For both Shohei as a player and baseball as an institution. Major League teams may not have been ready in 2013 to try something so radical, to run that supreme risk of wear and tear with a potential star or to fly in the face of the jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none sensibility that had ruled the game for so long. But by 2018, Shohei had proved the concept. And made his demands clear. Both ways or no ways. The majors were finally ready to see it his way.



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Sweater and shirt by **Prada**
Pants from **ABC Signature Costume**

IT WAS PROBABLY always going to be a Japanese ballplayer who reminded us what baseball at its best could be. With its feverish game-day atmosphere and galaxy of superstars, baseball in Japan retains the potency of baseball in America from 25, 50, 75 years ago, when baseball was our game, and players were not just our most famous athletes but our most famous anybodys.

It has been some time since a new baseball player has become a household name. But it was palpable all last year that we were witnessing someone who might reframe the possibilities, for generations to come, for what any one individual player could do in the game. The thrust was awe. But opportunism, as well. Here was the saviour baseball had been waiting for. To re-energize a game that had suffered a nation's shift in interests toward other sports, towards other stars, towards other obsessions measured in seconds of entertainment, rather than extra innings and endless summers. This was an entirely reasonable evolution. Baseball would be relegated to the back burner for good. But what if, 2021 seemed to tease, that inevitable fate were in fact reversible?

"This brother is special, make no mistake about it," Stephen A. Smith said in July, on ESPN's *First Take.* "But the fact that you've got a foreign player that doesn't speak English, that needs an interpreter—believe it or not, I think contributes to harming the game to some degree, when that's your box office appeal. It needs to be somebody like Bryce Harper, Mike Trout, those guys." He continued, "I understand that baseball is an international sport itself in terms of participation. But when you talk about an audience gravitating to the tube, or to the ballpark, to actually watch you, I don't think it helps that the number one face is a dude that needs an interpreter so that you can understand what the hell he's saying in this country."

Smith ultimately apologized for his comments but was hammered for both his contention that the star of an American sports league needs to speak English—and that anyone would necessarily care one way or the other. When I ask Shohei what he made of Smith's comments, he (ironically) understands my question in English and chuckles.

"I mean, if I *could* speak English, I would speak English," he says in Japanese. "Of course I would *want* to. Obviously it wouldn't hurt to be able to speak English. There would only be positive things to come from that. But I came here to play baseball, at the end of the day, and I've felt like my play on the field could be my way of communicating with the people, with the fans. That's all I really took from that in the end.

"It's mandatory in school, for, like, six years in Japan," he adds. "Middle school, high school, which everyone takes. That was the only exposure to English I had before I came over. My high school English teacher was actually my baseball coach...," he says, laughing, as something appears to occur to him in real time. "Now that I think about it, he probably can't speak the language that well. But they teach it to us to, like, pass tests. They don't really teach it to be..." To be broadcast on *SportsCenter.* To be making the charismatic case for rejuvenating a nation's latent baseball fandom. "Not that I want to be dissing the whole English educational system of Japan...."

Part of what Smith was presupposing, I suggest to Shohei, is that he has become the quote-unquote face of baseball. And that baseball needs him to act a certain way to carry the game on his shoulders. *Do you feel any new pressure to represent more than yourself or your team, and instead the whole game?*

"More than pressure," he says, "I'm actually happy to hear that. It's what I came here for, to be the best player I can. And hearing 'the face of baseball', that's very welcoming to me, and it gives me more motivation to—because I've only had, this was my first really good year. And it's only one year. So it gives me more motivation to keep it up, and have more great years."

The debate over who, exactly, should "save baseball" is an extension of the desperate sense, borne out by years of decline in popularity, that baseball needs a saviour in the first place. That something is broken, or at the very least flat, and that something fundamental must pivot in order for baseball to thrive again. I ask him what he'd change about the game as it currently works. He considers, then says, "Honestly, I'm satisfied with everything. No need to make any drastic changes."

But there is that thing, I tell him, that so many of us in the U.S. feel in our bones, where we can sense that baseball has faded in the collective cultural imagination. Particularly for a writer like this one whose love of baseball and love of movies awakened at the precise same moment, when baseball seemed to be the only topic that Hollywood was interested in. I'm talking about the golden span that produced *Bull Durham* (1988), *Major League* (1989), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *Mr. Baseball* (1992), *A League of Their Own* (1992), *The Sandlot* (1993), *Rookie of the Year* (1993), *Angels in the Outfield* (1994), and *Little Big League* (1994). For the record, Shohei has seen none of these, not even *Mr. Baseball,* about an American in the NPB, but likes *Rudy* (1993). How could any reasonable American eight-year-old conclude, just then, that baseball was not the most important text of an American life? And yet. After surging through the summer of Sosa and McGwire, through the steroids scandal, and then a two-decade decline into a sports landscape populated by the riches of an ascendant NBA, a resuscitated NFL, and overseas TV deals for the Premier League and Formula 1, it's easy to look back and see how those halcyon days were always going to end, and how baseball, that unmistakable wallpaper

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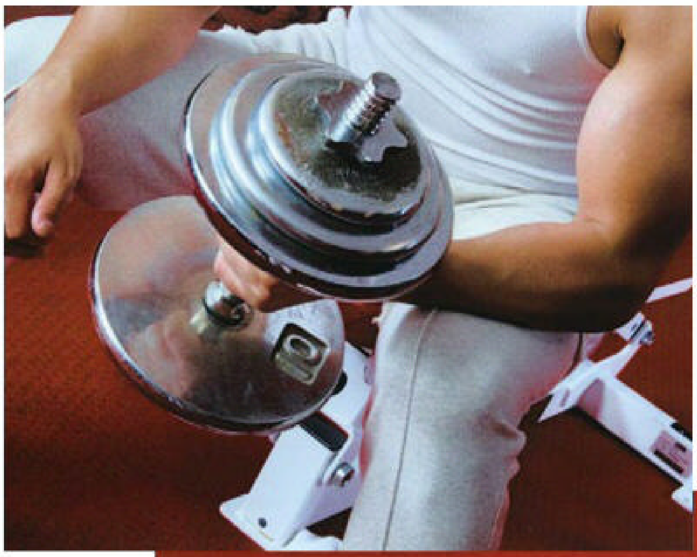


of the American century, might fade for good from too much time in the sun.

And yet. And yet. Shohei Ohtani has something to say about my terminal prognostication.

“Baseball was born here, and I personally want baseball to be the most popular sport in the United States. So if I can contribute in any way to help that, I’m more than open to it,” he says. “But if you look at the whole baseball population in the world, it’s a lot less than, like, soccer and basketball, because only select countries are really big on baseball. But in those countries where it’s huge, it’s unbelievably huge.”

What he’s saying is that it’s a very America-centric idea that baseball is dying. What he’s saying is that if you ever get the sense again that baseball is dying, you might take a trip to Japan.

THIS WINTER, SHOHEI returned to Japan, as he does each off-season, to spend time at his place in Tokyo, his old house in Ōshū, and at the hot springs in Iwate where he goes with his family over New Year’s to get away from “the flashbulb lights” in his home country. “He’s already tall for a Japanese guy, so he stands out anyway, ” says Ippei, who’s had a front-row seat to the Shohei circus for years, ever since he was the interpreter for foreign players on the Fighters. “He hasn’t really been able to go out freely since his rookie year with the Fighters.” Crushes of fans. Perpetual media presence. Stalkers in the dorms in Hokkaidō, Ippei recalls. The mania now has compounded so that Shohei hardly ever appears in public in Japan, and when he does, he’s forced to move cautiously between house and car and the occasional restaurant, where he or Ippei must call ahead to arrange to be sneaked in through the side door.

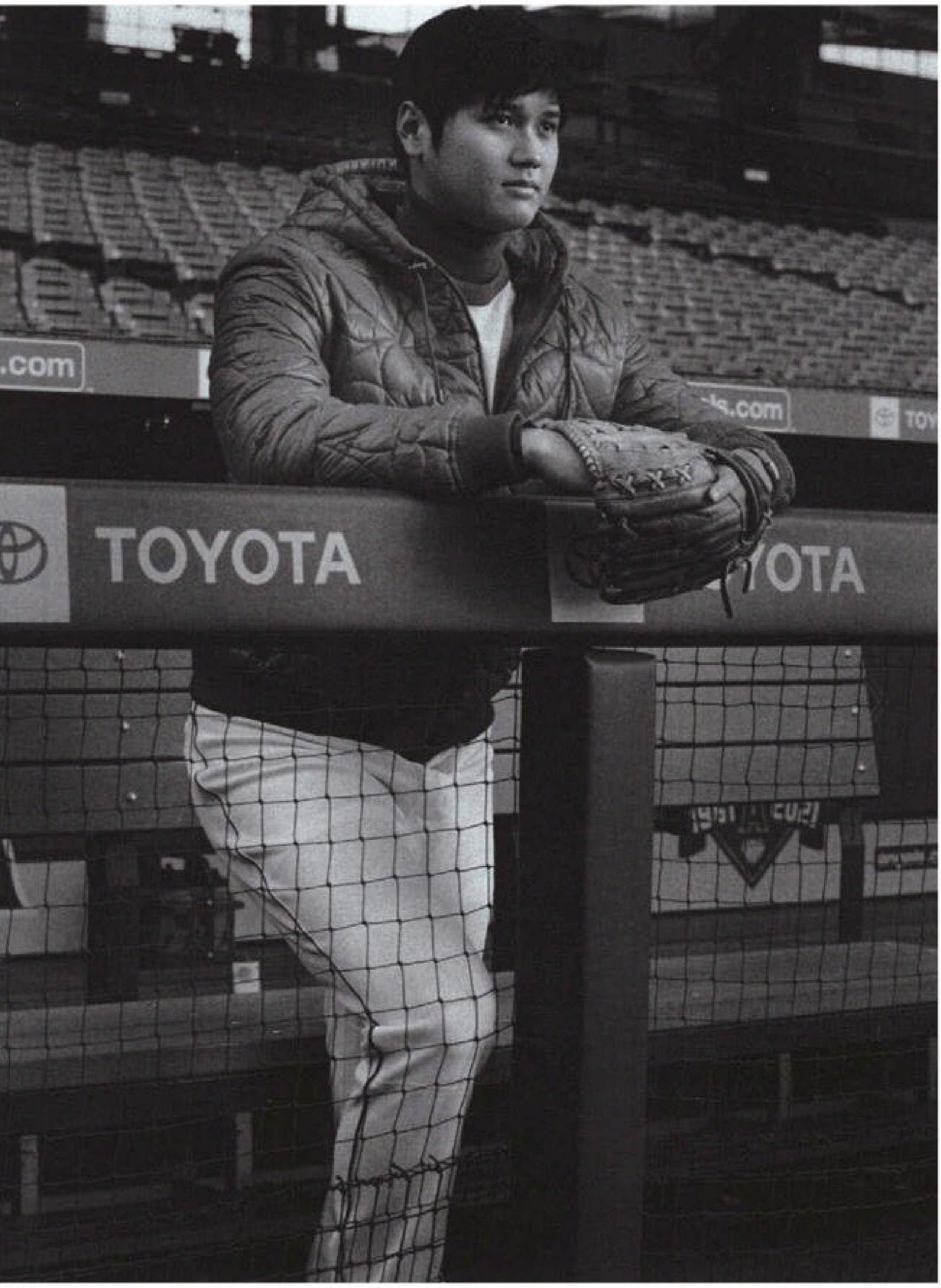
“At this point, I think he’s in his own category,” Ippei says when I ask him about Shohei’s fame in Japan relative to other athletes, movie stars, musicians, and politicians. “After the season he had, I really feel like there’s probably not one single person that can match his popularity right now. I heard a lot of people say that Shohei himself was a bigger attraction than the Olympics in Japan. The best part of the pandemic. I hear a lot of people wake up to watching Shohei. He’ll hit a home run and it’ll just lighten up the whole country. He just made their day, made it easier for them to go to work in the morning.”

Just because he’s playing in the U.S. now doesn’t mean the scrutiny dims. Rather, it intensifies. There are as many as 20 journalists who cover Shohei full-time for Japanese press outlets. Not Major League Baseball. Not the Angels. Just Shohei Ohtani. The scrutiny that Japanese athletes experience when they reach the highest echelons of sports is not exactly new, or all that difficult to understand.

It’s something that Naomi Osaka explained to me when I asked her about Shohei. “In the U.S., there are more star athletes across various sports, so the load is a bit more spread out. In Japan, there are fewer Japanese global stars, so the attention is a bit more intense,” she said. “Earlier in my career, I was much more well known in Japan, where there was a spotlight on me—and that actually helped when I became more successful globally because I was already used to it to an extent. I think Shohei can relate to that.” U.S.-based Japanese tennis star Kei Nishikori told me separately: “For me, it’s a lot easier to live and train in a small town in Florida, where it’s very easy to go shopping, go to restaurants, or go to a movie without anyone knowing. In Japan, it’s a little bit crazy. It’s just much harder to go outside on the street for daily life. For my career, I always felt it was good to live in Florida. Besides the great training, it’s good to be in a calm environment.”

Notably, Osaka and Nishikori—along with reigning Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama, Shohei, and the contingency of Japanese stars in other sports—represent a new core of Japanese athletic supremacy. I ask Shohei if he feels there’s a difference, and, if so, what he ascribes this generation’s success to.

“I think you’re right that there’s something going on. And I think the reason it feels like that is it’s easier to get out there in the world right now than it was back in the day. Like in baseball, someone like Nomo-san or Ichiro-san were the pioneers, they opened the



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Jacket by **Louis Vuitton Men's**

T-shirt from **ABC Signature Costume**

Turtleneck by **Hugo**

Pants, his own

door for someone like me. And I'm sure it's like that in other sports too. I just feel taking that first step is the hardest step—and it's a lot easier to get out there and challenge the world now."

At one point, while we're cruising around and the sun is glinting off the surface of the harbour like the crackling static in the air, Shohei looks out over this rarefied edge of his new home and says, in English, "Beautiful...." to no one in particular. It is impossible, on an afternoon like this, not to understand how a player like Shohei—or the last decade's standout talent, Mike Trout—forgoes a greater chance of winning to play for the Angels. Yes, six straight seasons below .500. Yes, a fan base that seems at times to comprise only residents of Balboa Island and Mike Trout's parents. It's an odd setting for the game's superstars. But this here is a theoretical reason why. The Duffy boat and the banana stand. The sparkling water of the sundown sea. The takeout from True Food Kitchen (a Shohei favourite). The things that make a simple life a little bit better and easier—besides MVP awards and hundreds of millions of dollars. Though, yes, he may enjoy playing in Fenway ("the atmosphere of the stadium, the building itself"), visiting the ballparks on the East Coast ("there's a lot of history there"), and sampling the delicacies of Chicago ("the deep dish")—and though, yes, all dreams of landing Shohei may be alive and well one day in the near future if the Angels allow him to become a free agent—this here is tough to beat for now.

I ask Shohei, known for that visualization as a teenager of his life decades into the future, if he has a sense of where he'd like to end up, not just for the baseball years, but long after. "If I had to choose right now where to live, I might pick the States. Just cause it's a lot more relaxing, laid-back, chill. I can do my own thing and not get bugged. The lifestyle is just...Tokyo, especially, is just a little more hectic and busy, stuff constantly going on. Back here, it's just nice weather, chill, laid-back."

AFTER THE 2018 season, when he was the AL Rookie of the Year and fans got an appetizer course of the first potential two-way career in a century, Shohei spent much of his second and third years in the U.S. on the back foot—recovering from Tommy John and knee surgeries, heeding COVID protocols, pitching just twice in two seasons, and otherwise attempting to find his way out of the first valley of his career. "More than frustration it was disappointment," he says, "because I knew there were certain expectations that were surrounding me, and I wasn't able to meet those. For myself, for the team. I just didn't really know how good I really was. Or if it was just because of the injury. There wasn't much clarity on why I was struggling."

Which is what made the fireworks of 2021 all the more cathartic. Near the top of the league in home runs, slugging, and OPS; racking up Wins Above Replacement at the plate and on the mound. A full season of the great two-way experiment on full display with a healthy Shohei. "It was," he says, "just fun again."

For all the unprecedented two-way scenarios and statistics that Shohei set new watermarks for last year, there is one thing that will never happen, but that I was curious to hear if Shohei had ever considered.

You're facing yourself for 10 at-bats: What happens?

He understands me without Ippei's translation and laughs his high-pitched laugh. Then he thinks very hard before responding. He is throwing pitches, swinging at pitches, seeing pitches from both sides.

"Five strikeouts."

He is weighing the statistics, of which he is familiar. He loves comparing numbers across the seasons, the decades, the generations.

"One walk."

A virtue of baseball's enduring, if interminable, 162-game regular season is the harmony between past and present that allows us to quantitatively measure the greatness unfolding before our eyes.

"One homer."

He wasn't obsessed with baseball history growing up, but he loves poring through the detailed stat lines he has access to now of the players everyone knows, but especially of the players he didn't realize were quite as dominant as they'd been in their time. "You hear these big names from the past," he told me at one point, "and you know they were good players, but you can see now just how good they really were."

"One double."

Like relief pitcher Koji Uehara, the Japanese transplant 19 years Shohei's senior, who was by several metrics one of the most sneaky shut-down relievers of the last decade.

"Last two: a fly-out and a groundout."

Very specific, I say.

He laughs. "I try to get as real as I can."

There are the extraordinary feats, the defiance of limits, the eruption of firsts and not-since's and never-have-we-seen's. There is the two-way potency, the dual mastery of the once sacred specializations, the fresh blueprint for how future stars might bring their singular assemblage of talents to bear on the game. Those are the ways Shohei Ohtani might break baseball by making it new. Or rather by making it new by making it old again.

By reintroducing the possibility of a bona fide two-way superstar. By reminding us what it was like when ballplayers were kings. When their every movement electrified a live crowd, stopped people in the street to huddle around a television or a radio, or prompted opposing fans to boo an intentional walk, as they did all last summer when they were deprived of the potential for fireworks. These are, in other words, the ways in which Shohei Ohtani is making baseball 1951 again—for fans old enough to have heard with their own ears the Shot Heard Round the World (or at least read about it in DeLillo). Or 1978 again. Or, indeed, 1993, for this writer, and those my age, who no doubt believed that Ken Griffey Jr. was more powerful than the president.

More than new or old, though, he is really just helping this country get a taste of what baseball feels like every day in Japan, for fans for whom baseball never lost its juice. He is imbuing baseball with an opportunity to go both forward and backward at the same time, in ways that remind us—and showcase—all there is to love and light up for. Shohei inspires this sentiment by being the best there is. But he inspires it, too, by simply loving baseball like I didn't know anyone still did. Or at least like how I figured only a child could.

When I'd asked Shohei how he might be different if he'd come to the U.S. five years earlier than he did, he focused on the baseball outcome: He might not even have made it in the majors. But I also meant emotionally. Maturity-wise. How different would he be?

"Honestly, even now, I feel like I haven't really changed much since I was 18. There wasn't a huge difference in those five years"—living in the dorms in Japan, just playing ball.

That is: when that pure engagement with the game could be preserved by living simply and single-mindedly. Then, as now. An apartment. A ballpark. A Tesla. Some takeout.

As we glide up to the dock, he thanks Balelo for the boat tour, and says "Nice ride!" in English. When I suggest that he could get one for himself, he looks incredulous. "Too much expensive," he says.

Before we go, I ask him to describe for me, in his own words, what a yakyū shōnen is.

"Yakyū shōnen is a kid who loves baseball," he says. "Who's just purely enjoying baseball. When I was a yakyū shōnen, I probably had the most fun playing up to this day, because I was just starting to learn a new sport, and it was just *fun—generally fun*. And all the practices were usually on the weekend, so I was waiting all week for the weekend to hurry up and come so I could practise and play some ball."

I ask if yakyū shōnen could be used to describe someone at the professional level too. Someone who, say, plays with unadulterated joy. Who smiles—and even occasionally apologizes to his opponent—when he does something incredible. Who treats every game like it's the weekend after a long week of school.

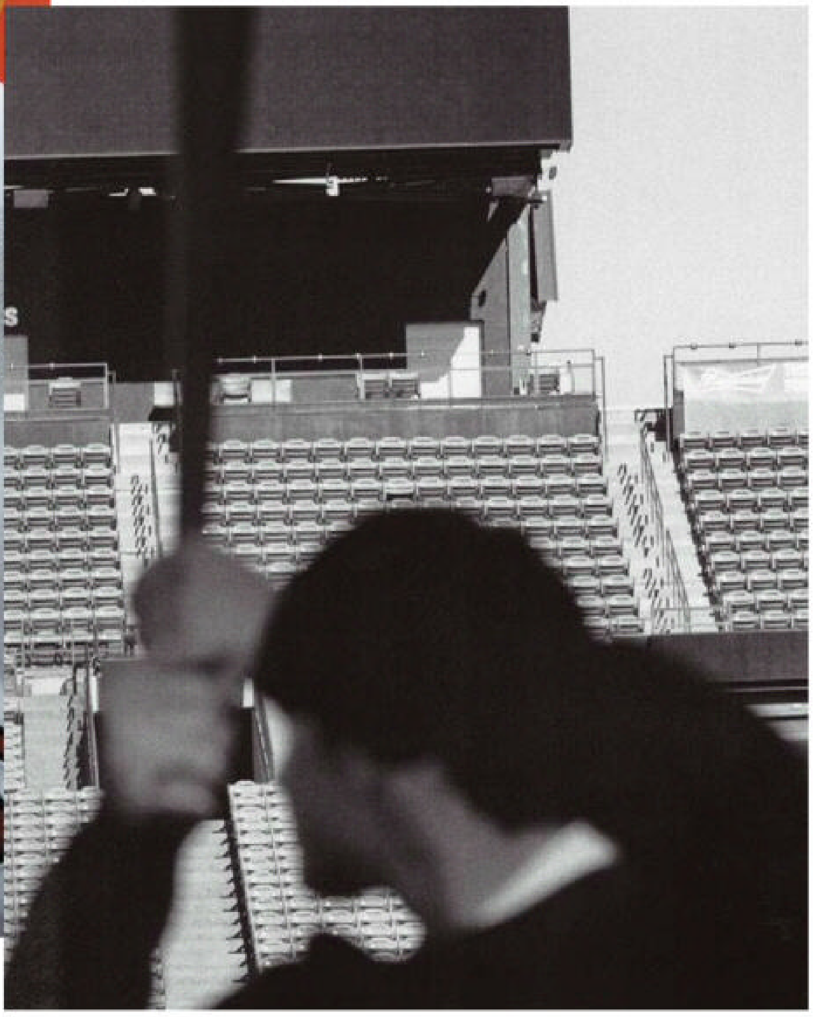
"I mean, it literally means 'baseball boy', " he says, smiling. "But, sure, I guess you could refer to a professional that way too." ⁂

DANIEL RILEY *is a* GQ *correspondent.*

↓
LEFT
Jersey, his own
Turtleneck by **Boss**

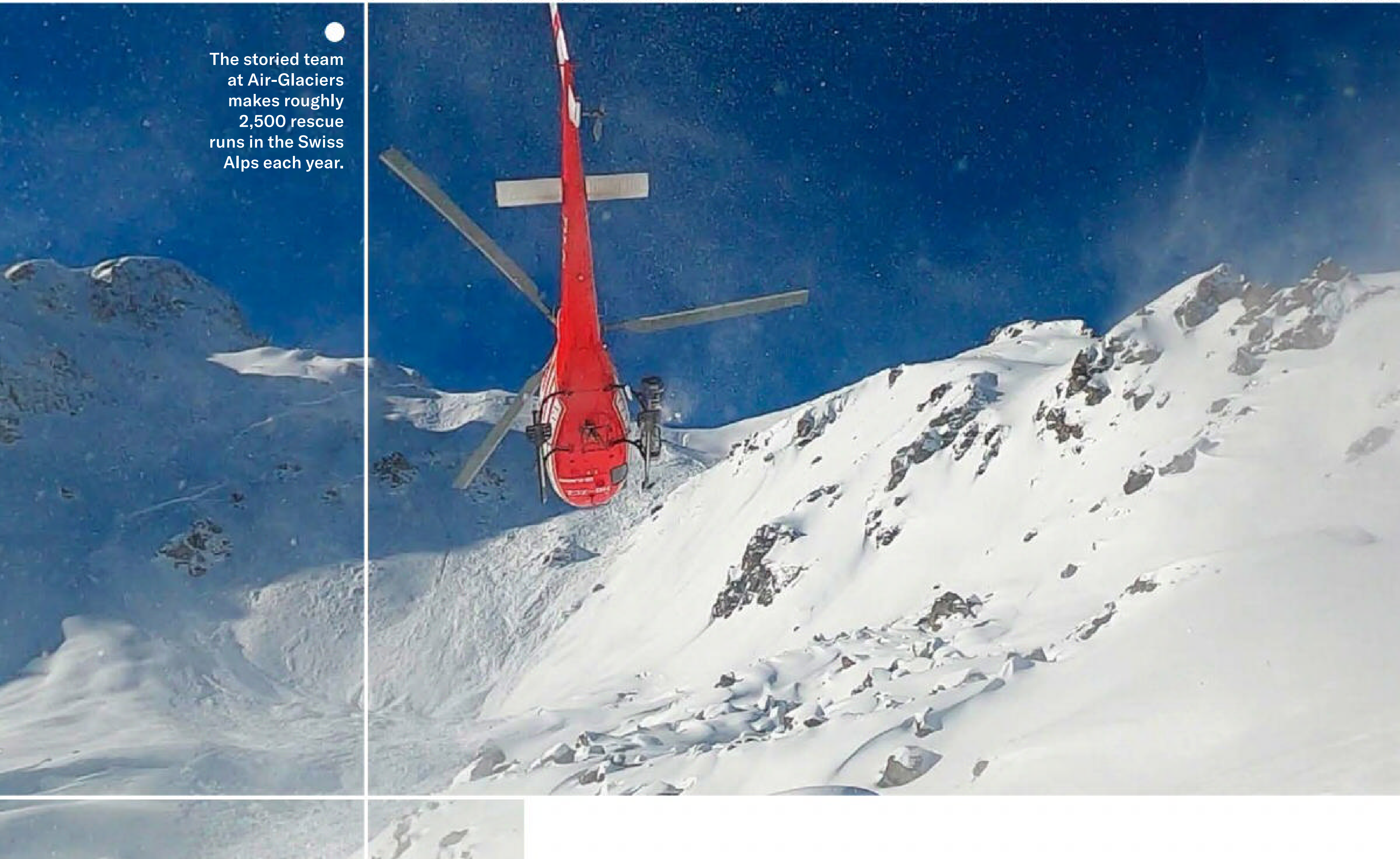
RIGHT
Sweater and shirt
by **Prada**

Grooming by Hee Soo Kwon using Dior Backstage Face & Body Foundation. Tailoring by Yelena Travkina. Produced by Erl Studios. Photographed at Los Angeles Angels Angel Stadium.



ANGELS OF THE AVAL

NOW MORE THAN EVER, SKIERS AND SNOWBOARDERS ARE



The storied team at Air-Glaciers makes roughly 2,500 rescue runs in the Swiss Alps each year.

BY JOSHUA HAMMER

VENTURING FURTHER IN THE BACKCOUNTRY—AT A MOMENT WHEN CLIMATE CHANGE IS

ANCHE

MAKING MOUNTAIN CONDITIONS MORE DANGEROUS. THE RESULT: IT'S NEVER

AGE

BEEN A BUSIER TIME FOR THE WORLD'S MOST ELITE HELICOPTER RESCUE TEAM.

FOR DAYS IT had been snowing, but now the clouds were gone. And way up here, high above the tree line, where the storm had wreathed the mountaintop, the only evidence of the foul weather was the snow that it had left behind. It was everywhere, spread across the face of the peak and down the rocky ridges like a thick layer of frosting on a cake and glittering against a cerulean sky.

AS THE SNOW BEGAN TO ENGULF HIM, JOËL JACCARD COULD SEE THE BRIGHT

Joël Jaccard squinted hard in the bright light and shuffled in his skis. He took a long look down the back of the mountain, studying the way the high slopes of Roc d'Orzival—a 2,800-metre arrowhead-shaped protrusion in the Swiss Alps—fell away beneath him. With his gaze, he traced a path down to the village of Grimentz, more than 1,500 metres below, taking mental measure of the obstacle course before him. Steep traverses, vertical crevasses, ice patches, and spines of black rock. It was a treacherous run, unsecured and unsupervised, suitable only for experts—the ultimate "free ride", as he thought of it. Jaccard and his two friends had trudged to this off-trail spot by taking a ski resort lift to the highest station and then carrying their skis uphill for another 15 minutes. Now he was eager to get moving; he figured it would take them 30 minutes to reach the village.

Of course, out here, Jaccard knew, things could always go wrong. Like many experienced skiers of the alpine backcountry, he took precautions. Poised on the ridgeline, Jaccard made a mental checklist of the equipment he carried: shovel, collapsible probe, walkie-talkie. In his red canvas backpack he had stowed an airbag that, with the yank of a ripcord, could inflate during an avalanche, propelling him to the surface of the cascading river of snow. If he found himself buried, Jaccard's radio transceiver—known in French as a *détecteur de victimes d'avalanche,* or DVA—was designed to help rescuers locate him.

But the chances of a disaster on Roc d'Orzival seemed to have diminished this morning. Hours earlier, Jaccard had checked the weather report provided by the Davos-based experts at the Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research. The heightened avalanche warnings that had been issued just over a week earlier had been downgraded for the last few days. The 32-year-old mechanic, a skier since early childhood, wasn't too worried.

The first one off the ridge, Jaccard plunged into the powder and glided downward across a wide snowfield. His two friends followed at a safe distance, a few metres behind. Then Jaccard turned his skis down the 45-degree slope and shot through a pass between hills. He skidded over ice patches and plowed through drifts, picking up speed, trying to suss out a route in the trackless snow. He made one turn, then a wider one.

Then he sensed trouble.

Up ahead, the wind had gone to work on the fresh powder that had been coming down all week, whipping the snow into an enormous drift—a huge pillow-like mound, known as a windslab, or *plaque à vent*. Jaccard had spent enough time in the mountains to apprehend the danger of this sort of drift. The new pile of snow, resting precariously atop the old, unstable snowpack, could break off and charge down the slope at the slightest disturbance.

Jaccard tried to slow himself; he swerved but couldn't avoid it. Suddenly, he was upon the drift, and then he heard an ominous, low rumbling sound. Turning his head, he saw behind him a fissure open in the snow, 35 metres back, triggered by his body weight. He watched as gravity took hold of the dislodged snow, sending it down the hill. The enormous white wall was sliding in his direction.

Jaccard scrambled atop a rise, but the avalanche, moving now at 60 miles an hour, quickly met him. He felt the immense weight of the wave as it plowed into his back, tearing off his skis, fracturing one of his vertebrae, and pummelling him down in the direction of the ground. As the snow gathered all around him, Jaccard groped for the cord on his airbag and gave it a ferocious pull just before he was fully engulfed. The movement released 200 litres of compressed air from a steel cylinder, which ballooned a dual airbag system to life. He hoped the inflated device would carry him above the smaller bits of snow and ice, and keep him from being buried.

But it wasn't enough. The torrent was unrelenting and Jaccard could see the bright whites and blues of snow and sky now give way to darkness. For the first time, he felt the cold rolling over him, beginning to encase him, choking off any access he had to air. Instinctively, Jaccard stuck his hands over his mouth. Then, finally, all went still.

He was lying facedown on his stomach with his legs extended, unsure of just how much snow he was sealed beneath. With his hands near his face, a small pocket of air had been fortuitously preserved near his mouth, but breathing was already getting difficult. Then, crackling over his walkie-talkie, he heard the urgent voice of one of his companions

"Joël, do you hear me?"

The microphone dangled on a cord extending from his backpack. But he couldn't answer. He couldn't move his arms. He lay immobile, struggling to breathe for about three minutes. Then everything faded to black.

OVER THE MOUNTAIN, in the Rhône Valley town of Sion, Gérald Maret was spending that morning in a small office building at the local airport. It was 11:30 on 24 January 2021, when an urgent dispatch came in: *Avalanche. Roc d'Orzival. One person, equipped with airbag and DVA, missing.*

Maret knew the drill. The 53-year-old had flown helicopters for two decades for Air-Glaciers, one of the most storied mountain rescue squads in the world. Since 1965, the renowned helicopter service has patrolled the high mountain passes of Valais, one of the largest of Switzerland's 26 cantons. Sprinkled across six alpine bases, the outfit maintains a fleet of 16 high-altitude-ready helicopters and is perhaps the most effective unit of its kind in the world; certainly it's one of the busiest. Air-Glaciers flies about 2,500 missions a year (augmenting its operating budget by selling Rescue Cards that entitle its 80,000 or so subscribers to receive financial coverage for all rescue costs not picked up by their insurers). The group's roster of seasoned pilots prides itself on being able to reach even the most forbidding spots in Valais in mere minutes.

Seconds after receiving the call, Maret sprinted onto the tarmac and climbed into the cockpit of one of the base's two Écureuil AS350s. As he fired the engine, a pair of rescue guides, Gérald Mathys, 50, and Pascal Gaspoz, 52, raced behind him. The two had both been flying into avalanches and other

Flight crews at Air-Glaciers are able to reach any spot in their vast alpine territory in minutes.

calamities for Air-Glaciers for decades. They had quickly grabbed from the hangar a stretcher, some shovels, beacons, collapsible snow probes, and an antenna that dangles from the helicopter's underbelly to facilitate the search for a transmitter's signal. Gear in hand, they piled into the chopper and Maret lifted quickly off the pavement. But before they could plot a course into the mountains, they had a quick stop to make.

WHITES AND BLUES OF SNOW AND SKY GIVE WAY TO DARKNESS. HE FELT THE COLD ROLL OVER HIM. THEN, FINALLY, ALL WENT STILL.

Maret zipped over the Rhône, banked low, and brought the helicopter down in a quiet residential section of Sion. Pierre Féraud, a 55-year-old Air-Glaciers physician, climbed aboard. He'd been passing the day at home; on vacation officially, but the only doctor available.

Seven minutes had elapsed since the alert.

Aloft again, Maret roared south-east, skirting the Château de Tourbillon, a 13th-century turreted castle perched on an outcropping above Sion. He gained speed, reaching 150 miles an hour as he guided the chopper over glacier-carved valleys and gorges, blanketed in brilliant new snow. Maret, who'd been flying in the Alps and the Canadian Rockies for years, was used to the vicissitudes of high-altitude flying—the ice fog that can obscure ski-lift cables and hide canyon walls, the tricky winds that can send a chopper careening. Today, however, was cloudless and the air was nearly still. The visibility was perfect and he could see, just over a mile ahead, the looming jagged peak of Roc d'Orzival.

Twenty-two minutes had now passed since the call reached headquarters.

DOWN BELOW, the fantastically imposing terrain of Valais spread out in all directions. A ski mecca, the French-speaking region in the corner of south-west Switzerland is dominated by the iconic Matterhorn. The area is buffeted in winter by blasting winds that pile unstable drifts on steep mountain inclines. This has helped it earn a reputation as one of the most treacherous and avalanche-prone spots in the Alps. Since 1936, an average of 24 people have died per year in avalanches in Switzerland; Valais routinely accounts for a sizable portion of the toll.

The danger is felt even by those who don't venture onto the slopes. Disaster sometimes comes down from the mountains, as it did on 30 August 1965, when two million cubic metres of ice and debris broke off the Allalin Glacier in Valais, swallowing up a dam project and crushing 88 workers, the worst avalanche in recent Swiss history. Five years later, in the darkness of a February morning in 1970, while the village of Reckingen slept, 1.8 million cubic metres of snow broke away from the Bächji Alp and tumbled towards the town. Thirty people were killed, including 19 army officers sleeping in an army barracks. And in 1999, a dozen people in the town of Evolène were lost when a huge mass of snow between the peaks of Sasseneire and Pointe du Tsaté detached and rocketed down the mountain.

But the vast majority of the region's avalanche deaths, some 90 percent, involve people in uncontrolled terrain, such as skiers in *hors piste* runs, that is, skiers using unmarked or unprepared routes. These powdery, untrammelled runs often can be found at the back of established resorts, in areas unmanned by ski patrols and unprotected by other standard safety measures—such as regular detonations of explosives that touch off controlled avalanches and keep the mountain clear of precarious accumulation. Not surprisingly many rescuers—often exceptional skiers themselves—tend to regard the untrained and unsafe off-piste amateurs with little admiration. Their dismay has simmered for years.

Now the danger that lurks on these runs is intensifying. The effects of climate change—for instance, variable winters in which long periods without snow are followed by huge accumulations—are making Alpine conditions harder to predict. As temperatures rise, warmer, wetter air is creating fiercer storms that drop snow in fitful patterns. Fluctuations in weather and wind influence how the fresh powder interacts with old snowpack. In 2019, the Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research reported that approximately two to three times more snow than normal had fallen in the Swiss Alps that January. As the weather grows more erratic, and as the popularity of winter sports nudges skiers and snowboarders further from the crammed routes and into the backcountry, the risks are mounting. Over a four-day period in January 2021, off-piste skiers and snowboarders set off eight avalanches that left eight free-riders dead. "Valais is the centre of it all," Pierre Féraud told me.

The threats may be changing, but the region's place in the annals of rescue lore goes back centuries: Valais is the very place where organized mountain rescue is said to have begun. In the 1700s, monks at the Grand St.-Bernard monastery, perched on an 2,500-metre pass between Switzerland and Italy, began employing Saint Bernards to help sniff out travellers lost in the snow on the treacherous mountain pilgrimage route referred to as the White Death.

OPENING PAGES, PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF AIR-GLACIERS (2).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **YVES BACHMANN**

(Barry, the all-time rescue champion, saved 40 people between 1800 and 1812.)

Later, Swiss military pilots pioneered airborne mountain rescue in 1946 when they fitted skis to a plane and landed atop a glacier in the Bernese Oberland, saving the passengers and crew of a crashed American plane. But it would be a trickier rescue mission that would ultimately inspire the need for a full-time professional service like Air-Glaciers. In 1963, Hermann Geiger, an alpine guide and helicopter pilot from Sion nicknamed the Flying Saint Bernard, responded to an emergency call to assist an injured guide who'd been climbing a glacier. Geiger flew his small Bell 47 chopper to the scene, but was prevented by vicious winds from landing. Stretcher-bearers were forced to make the arduous climb to reach the man, who survived with a broken femur.

FOR ALL THE SAFEGUARDS INTRODUCED IN RECENT YEARS TO LOWER THE RISK OF

The incident galvanized Geiger to revolutionize alpine rescue. With the help of two fellow guides, Bruno Bagnoud and Fernand Martignoni, he persuaded a Swiss bank to lend the money to purchase an Aerospatiale Alouette III, a powerful jet-engine helicopter that could reach high altitudes. The same year, the men founded Air-Glaciers. The partners soon bought more aircraft, hired experienced pilots, and expanded their operation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the risks they took on, two of the three founders met premature ends: Geiger was killed in 1966 while performing a routine instruction flight in his Piper J3C; Martignoni died in a plane crash in the Swiss Alps 16 years later. Bagnon, who is now 86, once harboured hopes that his son would carry on Air-Glaciers' daring work. Indeed, François Xavier Bagnon was 24 when he became the youngest helicopter rescue pilot in Swiss history. But like so many in his family's circle, he died tragically. In 1986, not long after he joined the fraternity of rescue pilots, his helicopter crashed in a sandstorm in the Sahara Desert while he was surveying the running of the famed Paris-Dakar rally, an accident that also claimed the life of the race's organizer, the noted French motorcycle racer Thierry Sabine.

Since those early days, Air-Glaciers has become famous in Switzerland for its rapid deployments in Alpine disasters. They've extracted the injured from deep crevasses and carried them down from towering ledges on high mountain walls. In March 2012, rescuers raced into action after a school bus crashed inside a tunnel deep in the mountains near Sierre, killing 22 children, four teachers, and two drivers. Six years later, they helicoptered into the Pigne d'Arolla in the Pennine Alps after 14 cross-country skiers from Italy and France lost their way in fog at 3,600 metres. Air-Glaciers guides searched for the lost hikers for 18 hours, saving the lives of all but five, who had frozen to death overnight.

The skills to respond to such a wide variety of high-mountain disasters are honed by the Air-Glaciers rescuers through intensive training that begins with a three-year Swiss-mandated course in alpine guiding. That's followed by months of specialized practice and a year-long paramedic course. Every 12 months, just before ski season, each of Air-Glaciers' rescue guides and pilots must also complete a week-long proficiency course designed to refine their skills in everything from post-avalanche searches to high-altitude extractions.

During their most-recent training mission, before this winter's ski season, I choppered with a team to a mountaintop not far from Sion, where I joined 30 guides and 30 pilots from across Valais who'd come to renew their certification. On this November day, the simulated mission involved evacuating stranded passengers from a crippled chairlift as it swayed above the slopes of a ski resort. I was invited to play the part of a hapless skier in need of helicopter help.

The view from the chopper as rescuer Gérald Mathys reached the airbag that Jaccard had deployed before he was buried.

It was a beautiful day to imagine a disaster. From my perch on the stalled lift, I could make out the snow-encrusted Matterhorn looming over the brown alpine foothills. I watched as an Écureuil rotored into view, dangling two rescuers secured to a 20-metre-long cable below. Soon, two yellow-helmeted men landed on the edge of my chair, each wearing a harness and carrying a second, along with coiled ropes and a dozen carabiners. I held still as one of the men expertly secured a harness around me, clipped a carabiner to the cable, and wrapped his legs around my waist. Then the chopper hoisted us up and away. After an exhilarating one-minute ride, we were gently deposited in a landing zone where I watched the pilots and the guides repeat the exercise again and again over the next several hours—practising with cables of various length and envisioning, all the while, the wind and the snow and jeopardy they would no doubt be called on to confront later that winter.

While the Air-Glaciers squads might train to face all manner of alpine calamity, it's the threat of avalanche that haunts the high slopes of Valais with special significance. Every recreational skier and rescuer who has ever swooshed through Swiss backcountry lives in dread of them. "You hear that crack and the silence while nature holds its breath, waiting for the mountain to

go," one expert alpinist, who has lost several friends in avalanches and narrowly avoided being killed herself, told me. "Even the birds go quiet. You can feel your breath thundering in your ears." Féraud shared with me a video captured by an off-pister's helmet camera in 2020 as an avalanche roared over him: It showed swirling granules of snow, flashes of sky, then darkness, accompanied by moans of pain and screams of terror. The skier had somehow managed to avoid being buried, but he'd inhaled ice into his lungs and was spitting blood.

"Avalanche… *Je ne peux pas réspirer,*" he cried over his cell phone to the emergency dispatcher. *I can't breathe.* An Air-Glaciers helicopter-borne crew arrived minutes later and saved him.

DEATH BY AVALANCHE, IT'S THE EXPERTISE OF THE RESCUER THAT OFTEN DETERMINES WHETHER THOSE LOST CAN BE FOUND IN TIME.

JOËL JACCARD HAD been buried for nearly 30 minutes when Gérald Maret whirled his chopper across the ridgeline of Roc d'Orzival and spotted, from high above, the telltale mess of the avalanche zone. He circled for a better look, looping the helicopter across a field of broken ice and snow nearly 180 metres wide and 550 metres long. Jaccard's friends stood near the top of the churned debris, just beneath the jagged edge that marked where the slab had torn loose. They were trying desperately to pick up his DVA signal with their own digital beacons.

Introduced to the market in 1971, these transceivers, which emit an ever-stronger signal as one approaches a buried victim, were hailed as revolutionary when they came out. The technology is not without its limitations, though. Using the devices typically takes practice—and overcoming some difficulty. With a range of between 40 and 80 metres, they often require searchers—sometimes shocked and exhausted avalanche survivors themselves—to cover vast distances through heavy snow, while precious time is slipping away. "They're inexact, like a blind minesweeper, and they take tons of practice," the veteran off-piste skier who's lost several friends in avalanches told me.

Inside the cab of the circling chopper, the rescue team could tell from Jaccard's friends that his location was a mystery. Every moment felt crucial. Pascal Gaspoz, a rangy ex-cop from a village in the Val d'Hérens, was assessing their options. Among the first guides to join Air-Glaciers after the Swiss government terminated its own police-rescue operations and turned the responsibility fully over to private companies in 1995, he'd been involved in hundreds of avalanche rescues over three decades; he knew, more than just about anyone, just how crucial their next moves would be.

"Gérald, what do you think? Do we need the dogs?" he shouted into his microphone to Gérald Mathys.

Clearly, the beacons on the ground weren't working; perhaps, Gaspoz figured, a more traditional technique could. Air-Glaciers maintains a database of 45 trained rescue dogs and handlers in Sion and the surrounding valleys; at least four teams are always on call. Although modern detection technology has improved dramatically in recent years, the comparatively old-school help that a canine can provide remains remarkably useful in a giant avalanche zone. Dogs, which can smell through between 12 and 15 feet of snow and can work for an hour before requiring a replacement, are still among the world's most reliable and durable sensors. Typically, after a rescue team has been deployed, another chopper is dispatched behind it with a handler and a dog (very few, it turns out, are Saint Bernards; the canines pitching in nowadays include mostly German and Belgian shepherds, Labrador and golden retrievers, and schnauzers).

As Gaspoz and Mathys discussed whether they might need the dogs, Maret scanned the ridges, searching for warning signs of the biggest threat to first responders: a second avalanche. A danger with which Gaspoz was tragically familiar.

Twenty years earlier, as six mountain climbers were ascending an ice column in heavy snow above Zinal in the Val d'Anniviers, an avalanche surged over the group and swept a young woman away. Air-Glaciers rushed a dog team and 23 rescuers to the scene—among them, Gaspoz's older brother Nicolas. As they worked, another slide roared down on them. "It came too far and too fast for us to hear it. It was panic. I heard screams," one survivor told the local press.

The avalanche buried six rescuers. Four were quickly pulled out alive. But two men—Edouard Gross, 24, and Nicolas, 36—couldn't be located. Pascal had been working with his brother earlier that morning before being called away to another rescue. "I was back at the base on standby, and then the second avalanche came and swept him off," he told me. Rescuers found Gross's body later that day. At nightfall, they called off the search for Nicolas. Two hundred rescuers came to the mountain the next day. They discovered his body at the bottom of the avalanche field at noon. The event was one of the most tragic in Air-Glaciers' long history.

As Maret flew over the avalanche zone, he pinpointed the spot where the slab had detached from the snowpack before shooting down the mountain. He studied the long serrated edge that had been left and determined that the risk of a second snowslide was low—there was no more fresh powder to fall. He looked for a place to put the chopper down.

Mathys, meanwhile, had busied himself trying to determine what rescuers refer to as the missing skier's "history". After decades of rescues, he'd come to realize that his most useful tool was often his eyes. Scouting the scene out the window, he followed the skier's trail just above the disaster area, calculating his route, and then scanning the surface of the avalanche field, trying to spot a clue in the debris—a glove, a backpack, a protruding appendage, any trace that stood out amid the sea of whiteness.

A few years ago, Mathys arrived by helicopter at the scene of a massive day-old avalanche in the Valais; a search for a missing skier had been called off the previous night because of darkness and the danger of a second slide. As he circled above the zone, something caught his attention. "I suddenly saw a face sticking out from the snow," he recalled. The skier had lain entombed throughout the frigid night, but his head had stayed above ground. Mathys dug him out, cold but uninjured, and transported him to the hospital.

Now Mathys was looking down with the same intense gaze. And suddenly, there it was: a bright shock of orange in the snow 60 metres below. His first thought was that a high-visibility vest had been torn off the skier. Then he realized: It's an airbag. A piece of the latex balloon that Jaccard had deployed before being swallowed by the snow was now poking through the surface.

"Airbag!" Mathys shouted excitedly through his microphone.

Maret guided the Écureuil down to the snowy surface and gently put the helicopter's skids on the ground. Mathys leaped out, ducking low beneath the spinning rotors, and ran toward the airbag. Jaccard's companions, who'd been searching up the mountain, raced 275 metres down the hill to meet the rescuers.

"Pull the shovel out of my backpack," Mathys screamed at them.

Mathys had done the math; he knew the stats. He realized that in all probability, after 30 minutes under the snow, the man was likely dead. But his experience also told him that the rescuers might have a chance. They had to start digging.

IN THE MINDS of the rescuers that day, a ceaseless stopwatch had begun running as soon as the emergency call reached Air-Glaciers' headquarters. After all, when it comes to who lives and who dies, it's time that often predicts. Research on Swiss and Canadian avalanche victims has shown that those buried for up to 18 minutes have a 91 percent probability of survival; but for those buried longer, the survival rate drops precipitously. Of those who, like Jaccard, have been snowed under for up to 35 minutes, the likelihood of surviving is 34 percent. Beyond that point, according to the researchers, the survival rate declines to less than 20 percent then flattens out. That's because as hypothermia kicks in—about 35 minutes into such an ordeal—bodily functions slow and oxygen consumption decreases. As Féraud, the Air-Glaciers' physician pointed out to me, the chances of surviving an avalanche remain roughly the same whether one lies buried in the snow for 35 minutes or for an hour and a half.

Of course, Féraud and the Air-Glaciers teams had also seen cases that defied physics and biology—extraordinary incidents where victims simply got lucky. In January 2005, Féraud helicoptered to the scene of a massive avalanche in the Verbiers ski area that had swept away the caretaker of a ski mountain lodge. The man wasn't equipped with a DVA. A team of 120 rescuers searched for three hours, probing the debris field with their long collapsible poles. Meanwhile, five dogs fruitlessly sniffed at the snow with cold noses as darkness fell. When night set in, Féraud and the others had lost all hope. “We were certain that he was dead,” Féraud recalled. The physician trudged to the ski cabin to warm up after the dispiriting search, when the lodge's phone rang.

A woman there picked up. “It's for you,” she told the doctor. “It's the avalanche.”

Féraud grabbed the phone. He heard a muffled voice.

“What are you waiting for to pick me up? I'm freezing!”

“But where are you?” Féraud asked.

“I'm under the avalanche! I'm cold!”

“But where under the snow?”

“I don't know.... It swept me away.... You must find me. I'm very cold!”

Féraud got on his radio. “He's alive!” he shouted. “He's somewhere under our feet!” Rescuers raced back to the debris field and began listening in the dark for sounds. A rescuer dialed the buried man's phone and told him to yell out his name, Marcus, and then to keep shouting. Before long the elated rescue team zeroed in on the muffled cries rising from the snow. They began digging furiously and soon plucked the 35-year-old out, amazed he'd survived. The frigid temperature—minus 14 degrees Celsius—had allowed the powdery snow to maintain permeability, facilitating the flow of oxygen and allowing the man to survive for three hours buried beneath the cold. When he emerged, he was freezing but unharmed.

■ ■ ■

THE WHIRRING ROTOR blades of the Écureuil drowned out Mathys. He shouted again—“The shovel!”—and gestured to his pack, strapped tightly to his back. Flying snow and icy wind whipped up by the helicopter stung Mathys's face. One of Jaccard's friends grabbed the large-bladed tool and handed it to the guide. Gaspoz jumped out of the helicopter and Maret lifted the chopper up and away, manoeuvring the Écureuil to a safe distance on a patch of even ground 90 metres away. Féraud hopped out and was preparing his equipment—including a defibrillator and tubing to provide endotracheal intubation. “In most cases, he would be dead,” Féraud told me, “but I thought he had a chance.”

Back at the spot they'd found the airbag, Mathys dug one foot deep...two feet...three feet through the packed snow. Then, after 60 seconds of digging, he looked down at the exposed head of Joël Jaccard.

> The helicopter rose, found its heading, and sped across the Alps, reaching the hospital in 15 minutes. “**It was one of the greatest rescues** that we've ever done,” Féraud told me.

“I see him!” he shouted.

Jaccard lay limp and unresponsive. Gaspoz and Jaccard's two companions joined the rescue. Shovelling methodically, the four men cleared snow for another two minutes until they had uncovered the skier's entire body. Lying facedown in the snow pile, legs extended, he was almost perfectly horizontal. He was also unconscious—and he wasn't breathing. Mathys rolled Jaccard onto his back and shook his shoulders, attempting to wake him. Then he began chest compressions, watching intently for any sign of response. Nothing.

With his face to the sky, Jaccard remained motionless, not breathing. But then Mathys noticed something hopeful: a slight flicker of the eyelids. Quickly, the rescuers slid him onto a stretcher and contacted Maret, who was watching nearby with the chopper ready. On command, the pilot smoothly floated his helicopter back across the avalanche field, alighting next to Jaccard's body as it lay prostrate in the bright snow.

In an instant, the rescuers lifted Jaccard into the aircraft. The rotors roared overhead, but the team was unperturbed, moving in calm synchronicity. They zipped back to the landing area, where a waiting Féraud placed an oxygen mask over Jaccard's nose and mouth. Gaspoz grabbed the defibrillator and the intubation equipment. Just then, Jaccard's eyes opened. Féraud gasped. *He's alive.*

Somehow, despite running out of air three feet beneath the snow, Jaccard's bloodstream had retained enough oxygen to keep his heart beating for 30 minutes. Yet the carbon dioxide coursing through his body was poisoning him. If Mathys hadn't spotted the flash of his airbag, Féraud estimated Jaccard would have had about “five or 10 minutes left to live.”

The team stowed its gear and steadied Jaccard on the stretcher. In a flash, the helicopter rose, found its heading, and then sped across the Alps, reaching the hospital in Sion in 15 minutes. “It was one of the greatest rescues that we've ever done,” Féraud would recall nearly one year later, as we sat together inside the Maison de Sauvetage, or Rescue House, the Air-Glaciers' headquarters at Sion airport. It was also a reminder that for all the safeguards introduced in recent years to lower the risk of death by avalanche, it's the expertise of the rescuer—the ability to analyse a scene in the chaotic aftermath of a disaster and react efficiently under stress—that often determines whether those lost can be found in time. “More than the medicine, more than the technology, it was the guide who saved him,” Féraud said.

Joël Jaccard's final memory from the mountain that day was being immobile beneath the snow with his hands over his mouth, listening helplessly to his friends' frantic voices on the walkie-talkie. The next thing he remembered was lying in a hospital corridor, pain pulsating through his back from his fractured lower vertebra. It took him months to get over the effects of the accident. But eventually his spine healed and the pain of that harrowing morning faded.

When I asked him what lessons he'd taken from that near-death experience, he told me that his only mistake was rushing out on the first morning of good weather and failing to give the accumulated snowfall a chance to settle. “We should have waited a couple of days.”

As we spoke, the new ski season was just beginning in the Alps—and Jaccard seemed undaunted by last year's brush with disaster. He said he was looking forward to his next off-piste run. He'd even bought a new airbag, to replace the old one. He was expecting a busy winter in the mountains. Just like Air-Glaciers.

JOSHUA HAMMER *is a frequent contributor to* GQ *who wrote last about a rash of European jewel heists for the September 2021 issue.*

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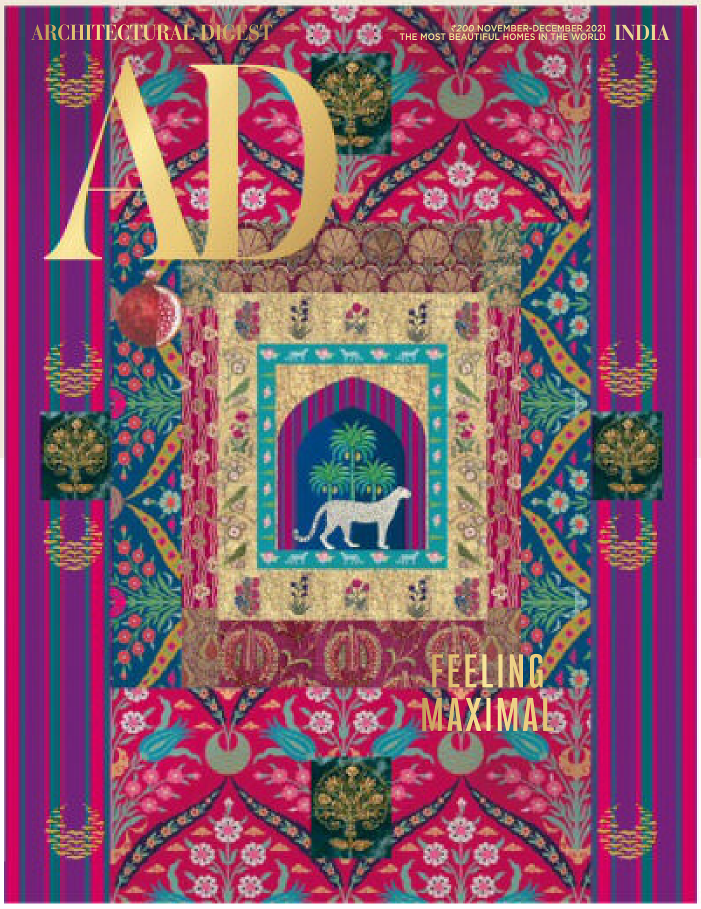
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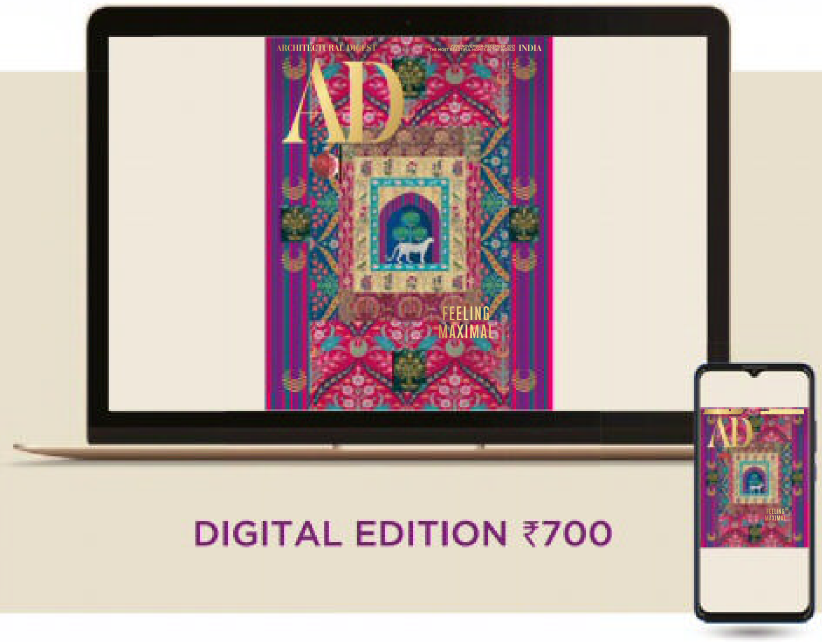
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₹25,500. For more information, visit lapisbard.com

An Elegant Affair

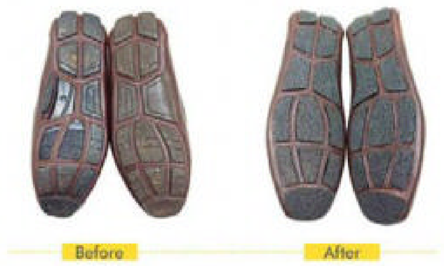
With a vision of an outdoors without boundaries, Poltrona Frau launches outdoors with a consistent and versatile collection- the Secret Garden. Designed by Roberto Lazzeroni, the elegant collection is characterised by the masterly workmanship of solid teal and organic, slender lines, expressing solid but lightweight features and is designed to address specific types of use. The Secret Garden is marked by finesse and attention to detail, drawing a trait d'union between Scandinavian design, the beginnings of Italian furnishing design, and the unique manufacturing skills of Poltrona Frau. Elegant and bourgeois, the Secret Garden is inspired by the designer's memory of travel along the Amalfi Coast in the 60s, and echoes masterful craftsmanship and skill in its design.

For more information, visit poltronafrau.com

To an Effervescent Beauty

Representing a beautiful collaboration between yesterday and today, Fabindia's Kala Kapda Karigar is the diary of India's craft history, presented in a modern fashion. An homage to craftsmen who have gifted the world fascinating crafts for generations, the collection offers a range of wardrobe essentials that will resonate with the progressive attitude of embracing modernity, with due respect to the priceless traditions of India.

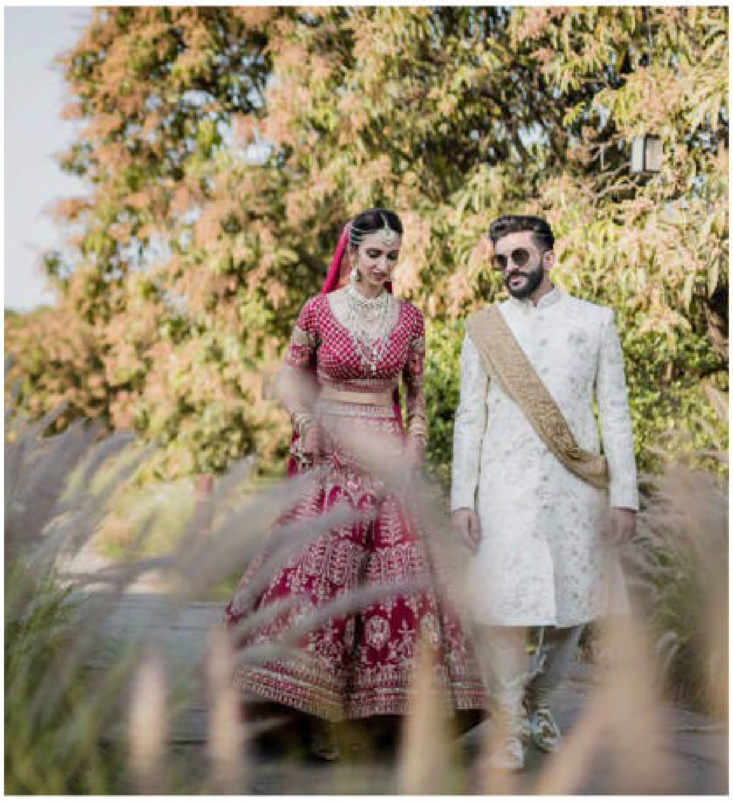
For more information, visit fabindia.com or follow @fabindiaofficial on Instagram



The Ultimate Upkeep

Indian roads are tough, and your exclusive leather brogues and loafers can only handle so much. And if you are looking for a brand that will bring your shoes back to mint condition, look no further than Cobbler by Pressto. With a skilled team trained by English and Dutch leather specialists and cobblers, say goodbye to weary shoe woes with the international renowned cobbler services brand. Trained to clean, polish, restore and repair, the team ensures to keep intact the essence of the fine craft and skill of your shoes. If your expensive shoes with island soles are damaged, experts can replace it with a better sole, be prepared for immaculate craftsmanship, imported materials and the highest quality to give a new lease of life to your shoes.

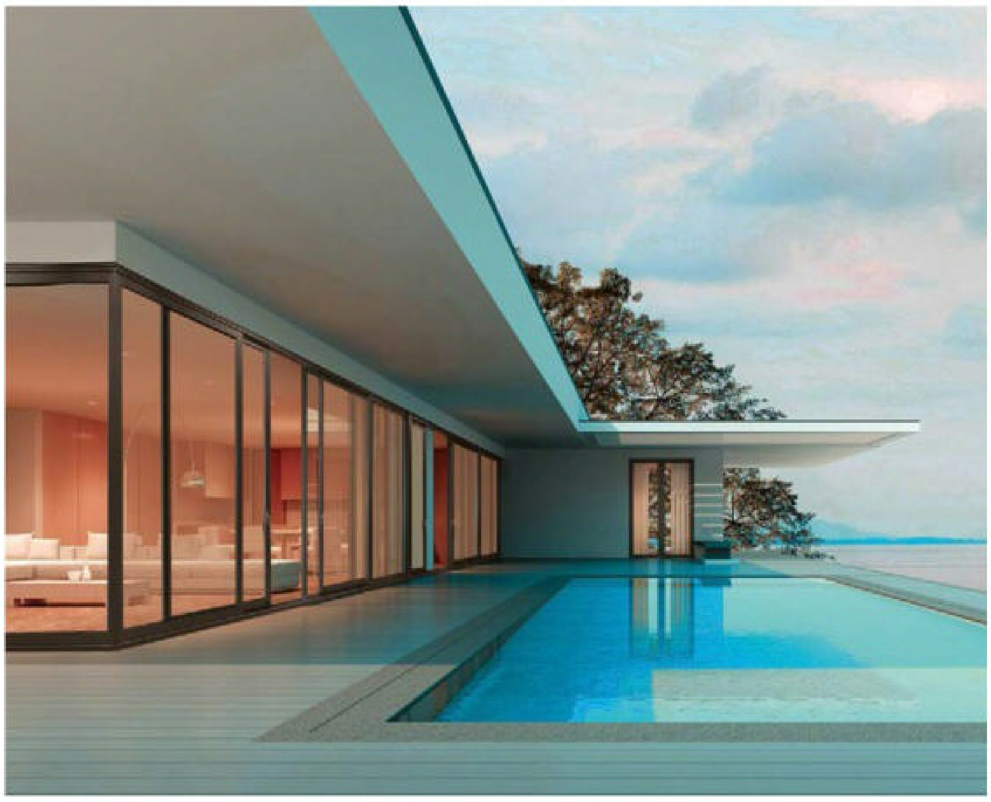
For more information, visit presstoindia.com/cobbler or call 9167188355



A Biophilic Wedding in the Forest

If you're looking for a picturesque wedding venue in the woods, Woods at Sasan, located along the Sasan Gir forest is your destination. This remote yet modern retreat offers a wedding ambience and facilities with every detail being exquisitely crafted and 100% sustainable. An ideal location to host intimate celebrations, Woods at Sasan is a place rich in memories and light on the environment.

For more information, visit woodsatsasan.com, email reservation@1000island.in or call +912877-281000



Innovation, Perseverance and Passion-Driven Legacy

With a legacy rooted to a 132-year-old global conglomerate – leading doors and windows brand Fenesta took a technological leap when it introduced its Aluminium Windows and Doors series. The brand's new aluminium series available in Luxury, Super Luxury, and Ultra Luxury, offers a seamless and aesthetically pleasing design along with being durable, environmentally friendly and fully customisable. Fenesta Aluminium Windows and Doors comes with a plethora of benefits making them the ideal fenestration choice.

For more information, visit fenesta.com

TOPNOTE
DAY & NIGHT
Eau de parfum

For the Exquisiteness of You

The perfect ensemble is never complete without the perfect fragrance, and Topnote — an exquisite artisanal fragrance line crafted for your modern and progressive self. Each fragrance is made with unlimited imagination, creativity, and freedom, and combines unexpected and rare extracts to create a masterpiece. Inspired by life's moments of love, laughter, togetherness and inner confidence, Topnote's experienced perfumers work with skilled finesse to bring fragrances for toxin-free, vegan, and skin and animal friendly.

For more information, visit topnoteperfume.com

Jewellery for Every Facet

A glimmer of opulence to embody the many facets of the modern woman, and help reflect her self-expression—this is the truth of 64Facets. Known for their rose-cut diamond jewellery, their conflict-free diamonds are sourced and artistically cut to maintain the original beauty of each gemstone. From cutting and polishing rough diamonds to crafting fine jewellery, each piece is carefully looked after by the in-house team of multigenerational and seasoned diamantaires.

**For more information,
visit 64facets.in,
follow @houseof64facets
or call 9910270209**

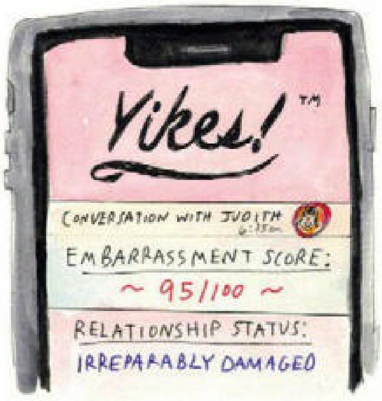
Design with a Difference

A leader in the luxury performance textile industry since its inception in 1997, Perennials has become a designer's dream. With an orchestra of skilled artisans, the company's skilful designs are durable and made to last. With every design made-to-order and handcrafted, Perennials never compromises on quality and craftsmanship, with its Plateau Collection winning the 2021 Best of the Year Award in the Outdoor Furniture Collection category.

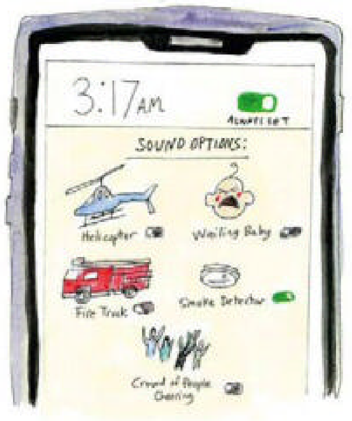
**For more information,
visit perennialsindia.com**

New Apps to Optimize Your Anxiety

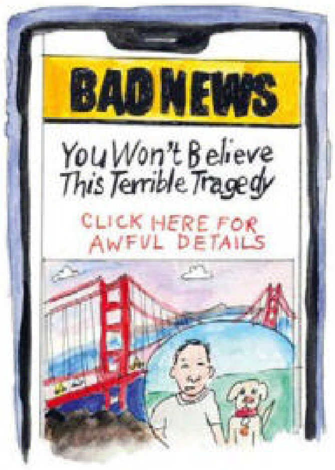
Seamlessly dive into your next existential-dread spiral with these apps designed to streamline your anxiety experience.


Yikes!™
CONVERSATION WITH JUDITH
EMBARRASSMENT SCORE:
~ 95/100 ~
RELATIONSHIP STATUS:
IRREPARABLY DAMAGED

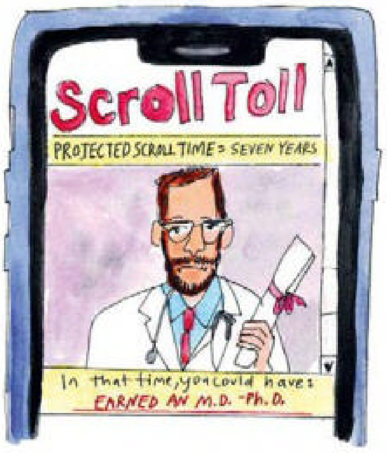
YIKES!
Yikes! uses your phone's microphone to listen to all your social interactions and note the strange, awkward things that you say. Now you won't have to wonder if that comment to your boss's wife in the elevator was weird, because this app will straight-up tell you that it was.


3:17AM
ALWAYS SET
SOUND OPTIONS:
Helicopter
Wailing Baby
Fire Truck
Smoke Detector
Crowd of People Cheering

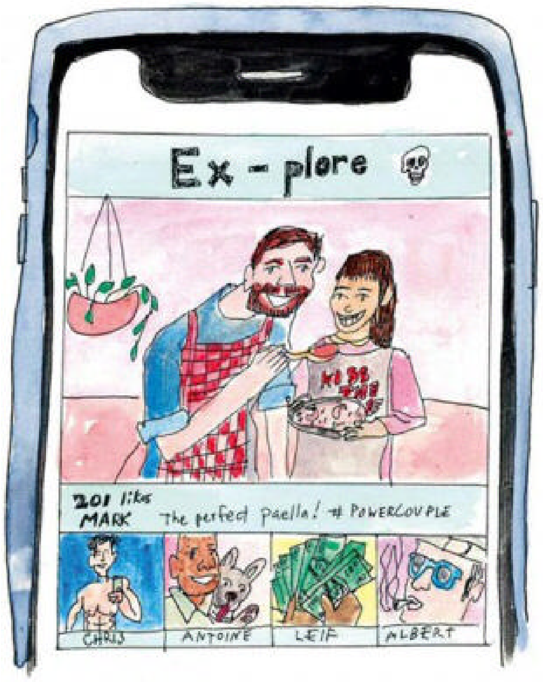
3:17 A.M. ALARM
Instead of jolting awake for no reason at a random, unpredictable time every night, make it exactly 3:17 a.m. with the help of this regular nightly alarm.


BAD NEWS
You Won't Believe This Terrible Tragedy
CLICK HERE FOR AWFUL DETAILS

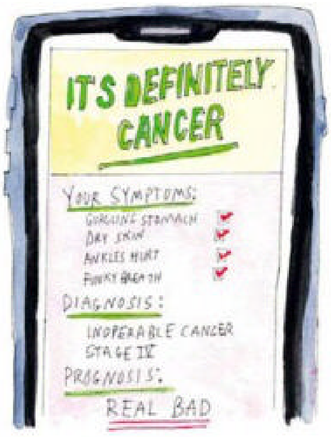
BAD NEWS
Say goodbye to feel-good fluff pieces and jump right into the day's most depressing headlines with this terrible-news aggregator.


Scroll Toll
PROTECTED SCROLL TIME = SEVEN YEARS
In that time, you could have:
EARNED AN M.D.-Ph.D.

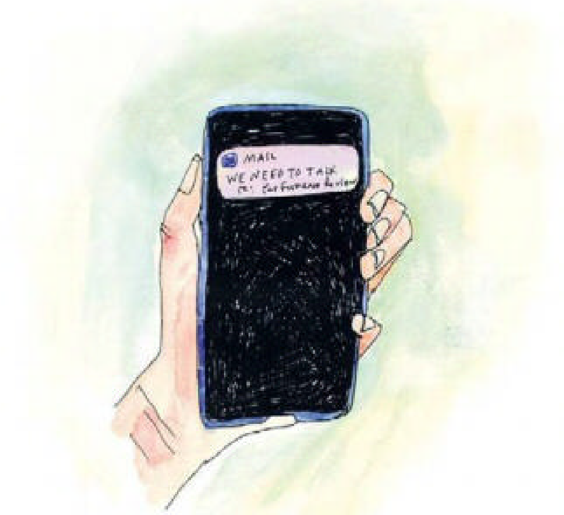
SCROLL TOLL
This app uses your weekly screen-time metrics to predict how many years of your life you'll waste endlessly scrolling on your phone. It will also provide curated suggestions of better ways you could use that time.


Ex-plore
KISS THE CHEF
201 likes
MARK The perfect paella! #POWERCOUPLE
CHRIS
ANTOINE
LEIF
ALBERT

EX-PLORE PAGE
Thanks to this app, you'll never have to waste hours googling your exes again. Fill out a simple questionnaire, and Ex-plore Page will create a custom feed of photos sourced directly from the social-media accounts of your former flames and their new partners, who are hotter and better than you.


IT'S DEFINITELY CANCER
YOUR SYMPTOMS:
GURGLING STOMACH
DRY SKIN
ANKLES HURT
FUNKY BREATH
DIAGNOSIS:
INOPERABLE CANCER
STAGE IV
PROGNOSIS:
REAL BAD

IT'S DEFINITELY CANCER
Made possible through a partnership with WebMD, this app allows you to type in any weird ache or pain that you're feeling and be told exactly which type of cancer you definitely have.


MAIL
WE NEED TO TALK
re: Performance Review

THE BLACK VOID
This is just a completely blank, dark screen that you can stare at while meditating on the meaning of your existence. It's similar to turning your phone off, except that work e-mails still pop up. That way you don't miss anything important as you're contemplating the abyss.

BY KATIE O'HANLON. ILLUSTRATION BY NOËL WELLS.

MARUTI SUZUKI

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दैनिक जागरण, राजस्थान पत्रिका, दैनिक भास्कर, हिंदुस्तान, नवभारत टाइम्स, बिज़नस स्टैंडर्ड, अमर उजाला,पंजाब केसरी, उत्तम हिन्दू, जनसत्ता, लोकसत्ता, हरिभूमि, द पायनीयर,जागरूक टाइम्स, राष्ट्रीय सहारा, दैनिक ट्रिब्यून, युवा गोरव, भारतीय सहारा, स्वंतंत्र वार्ता, सीमा संदेश, दैनिक सवेरा,एक्शन इंडिया, मदरलैंड वॉइस, देशबंधु, हिमाचल दस्तक,

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